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The Mystery of the Grey Oak Inn



“ I bet there’s something the matter with that house, it looks so awfully solemn.”

The
Mystery of the Grey Oak Inn

A STORY FOR BOYS

BY

LOUISE GODFREY IRWIN

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ILLUSTRATED



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This Story is Dedicated

in

Loving Memory

to

My Father,

WILSON GODFREY

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THE MYSTERY OF THE GREY OAK INN

CHAPTER I

THE FARM AND THE FAMILY

JIM BURTON lived with Sam, a hired man, and his grandfather on the latter's farm, three miles from a small village in Vermont. The nearest dwelling was at the crossroads, quarter of a mile away, where, standing on a slight elevation, was the farmhouse of Mr. Jones, the father of Skipworth, Jim's steadfast friend and chum. In the winter the boys went to school together and enjoyed the companionship of other children. In the summer time, however, they rarely met for each worked hard on his farm. First, they planted and cultivated the soil; then they harvested the crops and gathered in the hay; and after a hot day's work in the fields, even an energetic boy will not often voluntarily go on a long walk though it is to be with his best friend. Skipworth, or Skip, as all his friends called him, did not mind the separation so much as did his friend for he was one of six boys and girls; but Jim, who had neither brother nor sister, would often have been lonely had it not been for the unfailing store

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of amusement he always found in the glen which penetrated the mountain at the rear of the house for a great distance. He was growing up into a thoughtful, quiet boy, pitied by those who felt sorry for him in his lonely life with his cross old grandfather. These people did not know, however, how rich and happy Jim often was for he was possessed of many friendships unknown to them and to the children who lived in the village or on the neighboring farms and who were not familiar with the resources of the glen.

Chipmunks and squirrels, shy, busy creatures, often came scrambling down over rocks and trees to snatch food from his hands. Then they would hurry back to protecting branch or rocky perch and chatter their thanks to him. They were his friends. He never threw a stick at them. The water rat, the ground mole and the woodchuck went in and out of their homes openly before him. They were his friends. He never set a trap for them. The birds, whirring and singing overhead, near the entrance to the glen, for they did not like the gloomy shadows further in, fearlessly perched near and sang when he passed. They were his friends. He never aimed a bean shooter at them. These, and many other creatures of the forest, shared his quiet hours and taught him many things.

Dearer than the busy, animated dwellers of the glen, however, did he hold the trees; the upright, the crooked, the gnarled old trees, whose swaying

branches often bowed before the wind as it came sighing down from the cavernous depths of the forest. Jim loved the trees. When he would arrive, hot and breathless, from an unhappy scene with his grandfather at the house, it would be to throw himself down at the foot of some mossy old trunk and sob out his anger or repentance. Then rolling over, he would lie on his back and gaze up at the quivering branches or the still, pendant leaves, and the peace and wisdom of these silent friends would help him to regain his self-control. These unhappy times, however, seldom occurred. Generally he would run up in the glen with a wild war whoop and climbing first one and then another of the thickly growing trees, indulge in all sorts of pranks and games. Then, his play over, he would cuddle down in one of the many comfortable nooks made by the spreading branches and watch the sun set over the big, stone house.

And there, perched on one of the topmost branches of a hardy elm, could he be seen one early morning in July. He was impatiently waiting till Skip, who had come over to see him, should climb to his insecure eyrie.

"Well, here I am at last," exclaimed the visitor, who, with much effort and many complaining murmurs, struggled into a seat opposite his friend. "Why didn't you go up a little higher? This is nothing for *me* to do."

Both boys laughed for Skip's chubby face and

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body plainly showed how hard it was for him to make any extra physical exertion.

"My, it's hot, isn't it? The idea of dragging my one hundred and twenty pounds way —"

"Wait till you cool off, Skip, and then you'll see how nice it is up here. There's a breeze, too."

"Where? I don't feel any, and I don't see the use of climbing so far up, anyway."

"I want to show you something."

"Show me something! Jim, you are the silliest! As if —"

"No," interrupted the other, "I couldn't show you down on the ground. Just stand up and put your arm around that branch. Now, feel safe? Well, just look around, Skip, and tell me what you see."

"See? Why your grandfather's farm, of course, what should I see? And our farm next to it. And though we can't see it, three months' good, hard work is down there in those planted fields for both you and me, worse luck — and that's more than I *want* to see. What d'you see, Jim?"

"Turn to the left, Skip, what d'you see now?"

"Why, the road crossing the bridge, and going up among the trees, and the mountain."

"And the open space where my grandfather cut down the wood last fall, can you see that, too?"

"Well, I should hope so. It's right above the bridge." Skip looked curiously at his friend for a moment. "What you driving at, Jim?" he asked.

"Fun, Skip, heaps of fun, and not too much work

for either of us all summer. Sit down and I'll tell you all about it. My grandfather's sold more'n half the farm."

"Honest? Who's bought it?"

"Yes; the State Agricultural College, for a 'speriment station," said Jim, answering both questions at once.

"Where they going to live?"

"On that cleared ground you saw just now. They're going to put up tents there — it'll be just like camping out, I s'pose — till fall. Then, if they think it'll pay, they're going to build. That's what they told grandpa."

"It's all right for you, I guess," said the other boy. "You're lucky not to have farm work to do all summer. But I don't see where *I* come in."

"That's just what I want to tell you. They'll want some one to drive back and forth from the railroad station and run errands — only the running'll be on horseback — and they engaged me to do the work, and when they said I'd probably need a helper and could choose him myself, of course I said I'd have you."

"Bully for you, Jim," laughed Skip. "Then you're going to live here, just the same?"

"Yes, we've kept the glen and the house and the mountain as far as the pines, and our own garden. We sold that cleared space, for the tents, and our farm part of the land and the big hay barn for their storehouse and laboratory. They wanted the house and everything, but grandpa wouldn't sell it all.

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They said the view from the pines was the finest in the county. As if *we* didn't know *that*."

"Of course it is. Well, who's going to work the farm for them?" asked the practical Skip.

"Why, the college men and boys, I s'pose. I'm sure *I* don't care how they manage it, there'll be very little farming for *me*. Hurrah! Hurrah!" and Jim shook the tree-top till Skip held on with both hands and begged him to stop.

"I guess I'll get down now," he said in an unsteady voice; "it must be 'most dinner time."

"All right, I'll come, too." Jim followed his friend from branch to branch and they swung themselves rapidly to the ground. "I tell you what, Skip, we are certainly going to have a fine time this summer."

"Hope my father'll let me do it," doubtfully replied Skip.

"He will, all right, for grandpa asked him last night and he said yes. So all we have to do now is to wait till the college fellers come."

"Will they pay us anything?"

"Yep, look out for that bough, Skip. They're going to decide how much when they see just how long they'll need us each day."

"Hope I'll make enough to buy a bicycle with, anyway. What'll you do with your money?"

"Save it toward finding my father with, if it takes forever," Jim replied. "I'm going to find him some day, but it's pretty discouraging when

I've only got ten dollars and sixty cents saved up, and they say traveling's awfully expensive."

"Well, I wouldn't worry about that if I were you, Jim, for you know your grandfather won't tell you anything 'bout him till you're fifteen and you've got two years to wait yet."

"Yes, he will, too, Skip. He said last night when he told me about selling the farm, that when Sunday came and he had time to tend to me, he'd tell me all about my father."

"By cricky, Jim, weren't you surprised?"

"You bet I was. You could have knocked me over with a feather. But I can save up money just the same. I'll need every cent I can get and more, too, I s'pose, no matter what he tells me."

The boys left the glen and followed the brook down to the bridge. Here they leaned over the railing and tossed pebbles into the quiet pool.

"He may come back some day, you know."

"'Tain't likely. He's been away most ten years, now."

"What'd he go for, anyway?"

"I d'know. Quarreled with grandpa 'bout something."

"Who told you that?"

It was not often that Jim spoke of his father and Skip decided to improve this opportunity of finding out all he could.

"Sam."

"Has Sam been here all that time?"

"Yes; and his father was hired man here before that, too. Say, Skip, what d'you want most of anything in all the world?"

"Huh, that's easy," promptly answered the boy, as he deftly skipped a stone across the brook. "A wheel, of course. What d'you? But I needn't ask. It's to find your father."

"Yes, and to have him make up with grandpa. I want him to live at home with us. Oh, Skip, you have no idea how I want to live in a family." The boy choked with homesickness.

"Well, mother says that we 'most always get what we work for; so, if you keep at it, you'll probably win," replied Skip. "And it's great you're going to find out about your father, isn't it? Well, I'm hungry and must go home or I'll miss my dinner. So long. I'll come up again after supper."

"All right! Be sure you do." Skip ran down the dusty road and Jim threw himself on the grass beneath the old oak tree. It was a quiet sunny day. A few bees hummed as they hovered over a stalk of white clover near by and up in the blue sky a bird sang. Jim stretched out lazily in the shade and whistled. The sad thoughts which were always brought up when his father was mentioned, were soon forgotten. The selling of the farm occupied his thoughts and made him very happy. He would not have to spend the long, hot days of the coming summer in the fields. As the glen and the mountain land, the house and the pine plantation still remained his grandfather's property, the best part of

his home remained the same. It seemed to the lad that the disagreeable things of life had been disposed of, leaving only the pleasant, happy things. He planned many good times in the glen with Skip, and a care-free summer. And when Sam came around the corner of the house and called him, he sprang to his feet with the happy knowledge that he was hungry and quite ready for dinner; and that the afternoon in the cornfield was the last to be spent in that tiresome occupation. New and more interesting tasks awaited him in the morning.

CHAPTER II

THE ACCIDENT

THOUGH the glen was as much his room as the little nook tucked away under the eaves of the farmhouse extension, Jim's favorite resting place was the grey oak tree which stood between the front of the house and the road. In winter time, when the limbs reached out bare and ghostly fingers to the cold sky, he would often climb to the top and hang a lantern there. This could easily be seen by Skip, who would know when to look out for it. A red light meant, "come over," while a white one would say, "I'll come down." In summer, a red or white flag, hoisted well above the highest leaves, carried the same message. No nail had ever been driven in its massive trunk nor planks fastened to any of its branches. Tree houses were plentiful in the glen, for, if injured, a tree, more or less, would never be missed there. But nothing which might harm the oak was allowed to be done to it. Jim's grandfather had talked to him and made him realize that its beauty and associations, once lost, could never be restored; and, as the tree began to show signs of its great age, it was two hundred years old, soon after the boy reached the climbing age, he

rarely permitted himself the joy of getting up in it or of swinging from its branches. Yet he often spent Sunday afternoons there, screened by its thick foliage, and occasionally asked Skip, but never any other boy, to join him. He was careful to do all he could to prolong the life of his old friend.

Once or twice during the previous year, unusually severe storms had indicated that the oak might not be able to stand another winter of rough weather, and Jim's heart beat fast when he heard his grandfather say that he thought it was about time to cut the old tree down. For days he had gone about in fear and trembling, dreading each spare moment taken from his grandfather's usual occupations. He was afraid it would be devoted to the destruction of the dear old oak. Weeks passed, however, and as nothing happened, in time the fear lessened. So, this pleasant afternoon in early July, when, for the last time he had returned from cultivating the corn in the north field, he was not prepared for the unhappy surprise in store for him.

A quick, startled glance at the group in front of the house told him the unwelcome truth. For a moment Jim stared with doubting eyes. Then he dropped his spade, where it lay for days afterward in the long grass, and ran away to the solitude and the comfort of the glen. They were going to cut down the oak!

The boy's one idea was to get as far as possible from the house. He did not want to hear the quick, thudding strokes of the ax, nor see the old branches

quiver and fall to the ground. So he followed the glen trail almost to the end, toiling over the mossy, stony earth and rotting branches of fallen trees till he had penetrated quite into the gloom of the forest. Though he had gone a great deal farther than was necessary he still kept on. He could not bear to turn around and go home. At last, out of breath and tired, he threw himself down on a flat rock on which were piled up, as though for future use, a neat bundle of sticks and small branches, dried leaves and moss.

"Hullo," thought the boy, sitting up and looking curiously about him, "some one's been here before." He leaned over the half-burned embers of a little fire, at which he lazily poked with a stick. The fire had evidently been out but a short time, for the charred bits of wood still smelled smoky and sociable, and then, as Jim kept poking at them, gave out a faint, scorchy smell, as of burned clothing. "Oh," disgustedly grunted the boy, as he threw the stick away and rolled over, "I bet those old Italians from the 'settlement' have been here again, stealing grandpa's wood and burning up their old duds. Well, when once we find out who they are I guess they'll be sorry. Hum,—I wonder—if the old tree's down yet." His face clouded over and he began to toss pebbles into a broad placid stretch of the little brook. This slight noise alone broke the stillness of a perfect afternoon.

Presently, a crackling of bushes farther up the mountain and a cheery whistle, coming with each

step nearer the listening boy, told him he was no longer alone. Scarcely had he jumped to his feet and faced the narrow trail, now almost lost in the gathering dusk, when the nearest branches were thrust aside and the whistler appeared.

"Hullo," the man exclaimed, as he transferred a light basket from one arm to another and shook the boy's outstretched hand; "so you followed me after all. As I came by the barn I told your grandfather that no one could dig sassafras root nor pick checkerberry leaves so fast as you and he said he'd send you up after — why, what's the matter? What's happened?"

"Oh, Dr. Brown," the boy cried, "it's grandpa, he's —"

"Come, we must hurry. Here, you take the basket. I can go faster with both hands free. When was he taken? What was the —"

"Grandpa isn't hurt, there's nothing the matter with *him*," interrupted Jim as he scrambled along after the stalwart figure of the doctor, trying in vain to keep up with his long, hurried strides. "Nothing's the matter with my grandfather. It's the grey oak."

"What!" The doctor stopped so quickly that before Jim could help it he ran right into the broad back in front of him. Both man and boy went down together.

"Oh, did I hurt you? I'm awfully sorry but I didn't know you were going to stop," exclaimed Jim, who, jumping up and struggling with a desire to

laugh helped the doctor to his feet and picked up the basket. Suddenly his trouble seemed to be much lighter.

The man good-naturedly brushed off his coat and put on his hat which Jim handed to him. "Well," he said, "so long as no bones are broken let's take it easy and you can tell me all about it on our way back. From the expression of your face I thought some one was dead or very near it. But if it is only a tree whose end is come, for I guess that is the cause of your trouble, my services will not be required."

At the moment Jim's story was finished they turned the corner of the house and came face to face with the old tree. It was still standing. The sun, now low in the west, threw a mellowing glow over leaf, branch and trunk. It had never before looked so beautiful to the boy. "Perhaps they're not going to, after all," he thought. Then he saw the chips on the ground, the ax lying near the cruel gashes in the big trunk. He started to run away again but Dr. Brown's hand was laid gently on his shoulder and he would not let him go.

"Brace up and be a man," he whispered. "Just watch your grandfather, Jim. I guess you don't feel any sorrier about losing the old tree than he does and yet look at him. *He'd* never let on *he* cared."

Thus admonished, Jim sat down on the stone steps of the front porch and watched, with dry, burning eyes, the destruction of the old grey oak.

The work was being done under the direction of his grandfather. The dirt had been taken away from the roots, and four Italians, called in from mending the road, were pulling steadily on ropes which had been previously fastened around the trunk by good-natured, regretful Sam.

Slowly, steadily, the men pulled. Slowly, steadily, with many a protesting groan, the big tree yielded to the strain. The roots, though partly uncovered, still extended deep into the soil. The tree bent like a huge bow. Sam dropped lightly to the ground and stood at one side with Dr. Brown. Gray-haired Mr. Burton sprang among the now prostrate branches and stood immediately in front of the Italians. He told one of them to chop free a certain root. His order was misunderstood. All the men dropped the ropes at the same time and started for the other end of the tree. They had scarcely taken a step, however, when the huge oak, like a catapult, snapped back to its upright position. Jim's grandfather was sent flying through the air like a stone from a sling. He fell with a dull thud forty feet away. The tree swayed back and forth. When the workmen saw what they had done, they hastily grabbed up their picks and shovels and hurried off down the road, panic-stricken. Their departure was unnoticed by the others who were now bending over Mr. Burton, trying to find out where he was hurt. He did not answer their anxious and repeated questions. Suddenly Sam looked up.

"Jim," he cried, "go to th' kitchen an' take th'

keys frum th' nail by th' clock 'n open th' doors, both back and front, to th' house. 'We'll take yer grandpa inter one of th' front rooms.'

"That's right," Jim heard the doctor say, and as he hurried around the corner of the house the stricken look on his grandfather's white, unconscious face brought tears to the boy's eyes. When he tried to unlock the stout, iron-bound door which, at the top of a few steps, led from the kitchen to the rear of the house proper, many minutes passed before the key would turn and allow it to swing back on its rusty hinges. Then Jim ran down the long, dark hall and when he succeeded in throwing open the double doors onto the stone porch, there stood Dr. Brown and Sam, supporting their silent burden between them. Quick to answer their demands, the boy led the way into the large, corner room which looked out on both the road and the brook. With fast beating heart he watched them tenderly lay his grandfather on the big, long unused, black walnut bed.

For a few minutes the three stood silently watching the quiet, old man. Then Dr. Brown, for the second time that afternoon, affectionately placed his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Jim, my lad," he said, "run down to Skip's and ask his mother or Ellen to put a few things in a bag and come up here. I'll need a nurse."

The boy started, then stopped; looking silently up into the doctor's face the question he dared not ask.

"I don't know yet," said the doctor, kindly,

“whether he is going to get well or not — but he isn’t suffering.”

“I’m thankful fer thet, *I tell yew*,” murmured Sam, and he blew his nose and winked hard.

Jim ran from the room and was half way across the lawn when something that shone in the grass attracted his attention. He stooped and picked up from the ground near his grandfather’s hat a thin, gold chain to which was attached a small locket. Bits of bark were fastened to both by several strands of long horse hair.

“That must have been flung out of the tree,” mused the boy. He thrust his unexpected discovery in his pocket and hurried down the road. “I wonder how they ever got there and who they belong to?” Then he forgot about the little, round locket and everything else save bringing help to his grandfather as soon as possible. Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, came the thought, “If he dies without telling me about my father, what shall I do, what will become of me?”

CHAPTER III

JIM DECIDES

THE events of the next three hours followed each other with such rapidity that Jim had no time in which to worry about his grandfather. He quickly hurried from one duty to another trying hard to please and doing so well that more than once he was praised for his helpfulness. At last, however, everything possible for the sick man's comfort had been done and the usual night time quiet settled down on the farm.

The tired boy crept out into the long hall and laid down on the old-fashioned sofa that stood against the broad flight of stairs which led to the blackness of the upper stories. He wondered if the time would ever come when he would be allowed to investigate those mysterious rooms about which he had often thought and never seen. And then he thought about going to bed. But he was very comfortable where he was and decided to stay curled up in one corner of the sofa. It was lonesome out in the extension now for Sam was still in the sick room and even the big, black cat had found its way to the front of the house. She came, mewing, up the rough stone steps of the porch and stood un-

certainly on the threshold of the open door. Jim heard her plaintive call and tiptoed to get her. When he returned to the sofa she snuggled down in his arms and purred contentedly, one soft, black paw resting on his face. There, an hour later, Sam found them, both fast asleep. He covered them up and Jim slept soundly till morning. He never moved till long after sunrise and then not till some one shook him and he opened his sleepy eyes to see Sam's broad, good-natured face smiling down into his.

"Time ter git up, Jim," he said.

"Why, what is it? Where am I?" cried Jim, starting up in surprise and tumbling Blackie in a confused heap on the floor. In a moment he remembered, and caught Sam by the sleeve. "My grandfather," he whispered. "How is he?"

"Jest th' same. Hasn't moved, nor spoke. Ellen's still with him an' after you hev yer breakfast yer'd better ride Judge down to Skip's an' telephone ter th' doctor. I told him I'd report early. If it hadn't bin fer yer grandpa's foolish notion we'd hev a wire of our own. Come, now, Jim, git a hustle on. Run up an' wash an' I'll pour your coffee. Breakfast's ready and waiting."

While Sam was speaking he led the way through the hall and down the few steps to the kitchen. There, on a table, drawn out in the middle of the low room, was spread a hearty morning meal to which, in a few moments, both man and boy sat down. Then Sam went to take Ellen's place and

Jim started to get Judge, one of the two strong horses, to take him on his errand. As he passed a certain nail near the barn door, he reached up, as usual, to take his overalls from where they were always hung when his work was done. To his surprise they were not there. Nor had they fallen to the ground, nor did a rapid search round about bring them to view. "Plague take it, where d'you s'pose they are, an' me in such a hurry," muttered Jim, as he mounted Judge and rode around to the front of the house where he found Sam chopping away at the tree.

"Yer overalls? No, I hain't seen 'em, nor wore 'em, neither," chuckled the hired man in answer to Jim's question. "Ther 'round some'ers — whar you wore 'em last, prob'ly — you must larn ter take keer on yer things, Jim, er yer'll never hev any."

"But I *did* hang them up, Sam, I know I did," persisted the boy, "when I took them off the last time I wore them, and put them right where they belong, too. I bet some one's taken them."

"Wal, now, who'd do sech a fool thing as that, I'd like ter know," laughed Sam. "Ter run off with a pair of overalls, that is most wore out, too, ain't they? Wal now, Jim, give me a hand here, will yer? An' I'll help yer hunt fer those precious overalls later in th' day. But yer grandpa don't need me now and this old tree has gotter come down. It's too wobbly ter be safe. A wind'd blow it over on top of somebody an' then thar'd be damages ter pay. If them pesky Eytalians —"

Jim slipped from the horse and took hold of the rope. His strength, added to Sam's, soon pulled the old tree from the ground. With a last, protesting shiver it threw itself on the lawn. Jim turned away as quickly as he could, while a grim smile crossed his face as he thought that after all, his own hand had helped in the final destruction of his old friend.

When he reached the low, white farmhouse, Skip ran out to meet him.

"Hullo, there," he laughed, "I hear you've had great doings up to your house since I left." Then, noting the other's anxious face, he added, "Don't worry about your grandfather too much, Jim. I'm sure he'll get well. I heard Dr. Brown tell father last night, when he drove past, that he expected to pull him through all right."

"Oh, that's what they always say," answered Jim and he slipped from the horse who immediately began to nibble the grass in the dooryard. "Watch Judge, will you? I gotter telephone the doctor. He wanted to hear from us first thing this morning." When he returned it was to say that Mrs. Jones had some things to send up to Ellen and if he wished, Skip could take them and spend the day.

"Do I want to!" laughed the boy, "hurrah, I guess I do." He ran in to get his bundle and bid his mother good-by.

Then he sprang up behind Jim and Judge trotted out of the yard with the two laughing boys on his

broad, bare back. It was hard work to keep from slipping off, either on one side or the other, and twice Skip did have to get down and pick up the bundle for his sister which had fallen to the ground. Then Judge was persuaded to go more slowly and the boys outlined their plans for the day.

"What d'you say to going way up the glen as far's the falls," proposed Jim; "we haven't been up there this spring. And besides, I saw something on the trail yesterday which looks mighty suspicious. I guess the Italians from the 'settlement' have begun to come round again. There's a fire place up there and it looks's though some one'd slept there. You know we can't let any one leave a fire in the woods this dry weather. We'd be all burned out first thing we knew. So d'you want to go up there and snoop round an' see'f we can discover who they are?"

"All right, I'm willing," answered Skip, ready as always to agree with Jim in any scheme or plan. "I'll do anything you say. Well, here we are and how funny the house looks without the tree in front of it, doesn't it? So big and lonesome."

Jim reined in the horse and the boys looked up at the square, stone building, whose only sign of life was in the corner room on the first floor where the sick man lay. Ellen sat at the window and waved her hand to them.

"It gives you the creeps, doesn't it?" continued Skip. "No wonder you live in the extension. I wouldn't sleep there for a peck o' gold. I just bet

there's something the matter with that house, it looks so awfully solemn, somehow."

"That's because the old oak's down," answered Jim. "We're not used to the house without that in front of it. Well, I guess there'll be no glen for us to-day. I'd forgotten the tree when I asked you to come up, Skip. I s'pose I'll have to work out here all day, carrying brush, hauling logs and helping Sam all I can."

"All right, and I'll help, too, I just as lief," replied Skip. "It'll be fun."

"I have my doubts about that," laughed Jim. "But if you'll get off now and take Ellen's bundle to her, I'll put Judge in the barn, find Sam and ask him what we'd better do first."

"It mixes everything all up to have any one sick in the house, doesn't it," mused Skip, as he tossed his bundle on the stone porch and jumped lightly after it.

"Yes, 'specially when it's the boss of the whole shebang," answered Jim. He rode off to the barn. Skip met his sister at the front door.

"Oh, did we wake him up? Did we make a noise?" he whispered.

"No, don't worry," she said, kindly. "Those my things? Thank you for bringing them up. Going to stay all day? That's nice, for I'm sure Jim needs you now for company, if he never needed you before. Let's sit down a minute. I can watch Mr. Burton all right from this chair in the hall. Where'd Jim go?"

"Here I am," and the boy quietly came from out the gloom of the long hall. "How's my grandfather now, Ellen?"

"Just the same. When'll the doctor come?"

"'About twelve,' he said. 'D'you mean my grandfather hasn't waked up yet?'"

"Yes; he has been just this way ever since I came. I might as well be home as here. I haven't done a thing for him except wash his face and hands."

"Do you s'pose he'd mind if we worked on the tree?"

"No, chop and saw all you want to. I dropped a pitcher, full of water, a little while ago and he never even winked. He doesn't hear a thing. I only wish he did."

"Wal, then, boys," said Sam, who had come up the steps just in time to hear what Ellen said, "if thet's th' case, let's git ter work right stret off." He turned to the huge, old tree, lying prostrate between the house and the road, and, as the others followed him, Ellen continued:

"I'll sit in the window so's I can watch both you and Mr. Burton. Then if he seems to mind your noise I'll let you know at once."

"Say, Sam," asked Jim, as he took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves, "you seen Judge's halter 'round anywheres? I can't find it—had to put him in the box stall just now."

"No, I hain't seen it. Didn't yer leave it on when yer rode down ter Skip's jest now?"

"No, I took it off, when I put the head stall on, and left it in the manger. I'm sure I did."

"Wal, I guess yer didn't er it'd be there now, wouldn't it?"

"Well, I'd like to know, Sam, if you think I'm losing my senses?"

"No, carn't say thet I do," chuckled the man, "fer you hev ter hev 'em first so as you *can* lose 'em, don't you? Wal now, let th' halter go ter keep company with th' overalls, wherever *they* may be, and git ter work on this tree. Here, lend a hand with this saw."

Thus the morning passed. Silence within the house, busy animation out on the lawn. When, far off in the village, the noon whistle blew, all the twigs and small branches had been cut from the tree, tied together, and stacked back of the kitchen in the wood-shed. The upper part of the trunk and several of the big branches had been sawed through, making good sized logs for the open fireplace next winter; and these had been hauled, chained together by the horses, to the wood pile. The boys and Sam then dropped ax and saw and stretched at full length on the fragrant earth. It was good to rest.

"My, but I'm tired," laughed Skip, and he rolled over and tickled Jim's nose with an oak leaf.

"Don't, it's too hot and I'm too hungry," protested the boy, good-naturedly. "And I s'pose it's up to me to get dinner. Sam got the breakfast, didn't you, Sam?"

The man's only answer was a snore. He was fast asleep.

Then Jim reluctantly scrambled to his feet and, followed by his faithful friend, ran around to the side porch. Through the screen door they could see Ellen, busy at the stove. Appetizing odors stealing out from bobbing kettle lids told what she was doing.

"Oh, good for you, Ellen," cried Jim. "I'm hungry as a bear. You're awfully good to get dinner for us."

"Not at all," she answered; "I was glad to have something to do. Everything's all ready to dish up so set right down. I want to get through before the doctor comes. I'll eat with you as your grandfather's just the same. He doesn't know whether I'm in the room or not."

"All right, my, but I'm hungry," came the answer as the two boys willingly dropped into their chairs at the table. They had just finished their last mouthful when Sam led a horse and buggy past the door on the way to the barn. And the sound of footsteps in the front of the house told them the doctor had come. Ellen and Jim hurried out to meet him. Skip stayed in the kitchen to help Sam, when the latter had eaten, wash the dishes and put the room in order before beginning the afternoon's work.

When Jim entered his grandfather's room he noticed that all the windows were open, and as the

strong, midday light dazzled his eyes, at first he did not see Dr. Brown, who was leaning over the bed and touching his grandfather's head and face with firm, experienced fingers. But when he did see, he, too, hurried over to the bed.

"Is my grandfather going to die?" he asked.

"I don't think so," answered the doctor; "but he is a very sick man. Ellen, just get behind the bed and help me roll it out into the middle of the room. That's it; thank you, Jim. We want all the light and air we can get for a minute. There, that's better — and now, where's Sam?"

"Here I am, Dr. Brown," and the man, in his squeaky boots, tiptoed into the room.

"And I'm here, too," said Mr. Jones, as he also entered and smiled affectionately at his daughter. "'Morning, Ellen. How'd you like the nursing business for a full due? Eh? My wife said you called me as you drove by, doctor. I was out to the barn but I came right along up."

Suddenly, Jim trembled all over. What did the doctor want to see Sam and Mr. Jones for? What were they going to do to his grandfather, lying there so quiet and helpless? What did they mean, stooping over and examining him so carefully?

Ellen slipped out on the porch. She watched Skip, who had begun to chop away again at the old tree.

After the three men had looked gravely at the one in the bed for some minutes, they moved in a little group to one of the windows. Dr. Brown

began to speak but in so low a voice Jim did not hear what was said. Nor did he try to listen for he realized they did not want him to know what they were talking about. A few seconds later, when the whispered conference was over and they turned back to the bed, it was to see Jim, pale and erect, standing beside it, one firm, though dirty, hand, laid in a protecting way on his grandfather's shoulder.

"I know I'm only thirteen years old," he began, stumbling over his words as though afraid of being interrupted, "and perhaps you think I'm too young to pay much attention to, but you shan't do a thing to my grandfather, 'less you tell me all about it. I know we ain't much company to each other, and we fight, too, but he's all I've got and—," here Jim broke down. He slipped to his knees and hid his face in the bedclothes.

Sam leaned over and patted him on the shoulder. Mr. Jones closed the blinds and thus shut out the glaring light. The room grew cool and comfortable again and for a moment the only sound was the labored breathing of the gray-haired man on the old-fashioned bed. Then Dr. Brown spoke softly to the still kneeling boy whose face was hidden in the big feather pillow. "Jim, my boy," he said, "look up. I want to ask you something. How long have you known me?"

Surprised at the question, the boy slowly rose to his feet and faced the doctor. "Why, all my life, Dr. Brown," he answered; "why do you ask me that?"

"That's so, my lad, and I knew your father and mother before you were born. And Sam has known your grandfather even longer than that. You believe that we both want to do the best thing for your grandfather, don't you? Of course you do. Well, then, Mr. Jones, his other oldest friend, has decided with us that — that is — we want —" he glanced up at the men standing beside him as though waiting for them to finish the sentence for him.

"You see, Jim," began Mr. Jones, and, sitting in a chair he drew the boy down on his knee, "Sam and I've said 'yes' to what the doctor thinks 's the only thing to be done for your grandfather and so we — that is — I — hope you'll consent, too. Sam and I might almost be considered next of kin with you, you know."

"Mebbe we'd orter hev hed you listen, too, when th' doctor wuz a talking," said Sam, "but yer know you *air* young, an'—"

"I know that all right," indignantly interrupted the boy, a bright red spot appearing on either cheek, "but I guess I'll know what you want to do to my grandfather or you don't do it, that's all."

"You are older than I thought, Jim," said the doctor, gravely. "Years do not always count. I'm sorry to have misjudged you. I'll tell you all about the operation and then I think you'll consent to it as quickly as Sam and Mr. Jones did. For of course I need your permission before I can do anything."

"Operation? Oh, Dr. Brown!"

"Don't be frightened about it, Jim, it isn't so bad as it sounds. Call Ellen in to take our place and I'll tell you all about it."

In a few minutes Dr. Brown and Jim were alone on the porch. Sam was hard at work again with Skip and the latter's father had gone to the barn to get the horse and buggy. Jim drew a long breath and looked up in the doctor's face. "Well, my boy," the doctor began, "when your grandfather was flung out of the tree, two things happened. He fell on his head as well as his back. Partial paralysis resulted, owing to bruised nerves, and concussion of the brain, because his skull was crushed. A little bit of bone presses on the brain. That's why he's unconscious. Time, rest and quiet will cure his paralysis, but nothing will restore his mind save an operation." The man stopped abruptly and looked searchingly into the white face up-turned to his. The boy never flinched.

"Do you mean," he said, "that if the operation fails, he'll die?"

"Yes, Jim, just that."

"Well, please wait a minute, I'll come back." He walked to the end of the porch and stood there for some time, silently looking up at the trees on the slope of the mountain. When he returned, the expression of his face had quite changed. He was still, of course, the same Jim Burton, but something, a certain, new expression to his eyes, and a firmness around his strong mouth and chin, showed that here

was, indeed, a new boy. He began to speak at once.

“Dr. Brown, do you know where my father is?”

“No, Jim, your grandfather’s the only one who knows that.”

“And he can’t tell.”

“Well, not now, of course.”

“Then, we must have that operation. Right away, I s’pose.”

“The sooner the better, Jim.” The doctor drew a long breath of relief. The matter was settled easier than he thought it would be. For a few moments the two sat in silence. Then the doctor said, “Jim, what made you look up at the mountain in that way just now?”

“Because,” the boy hesitated and flushed. Then with an embarrassed smile he added, “I was afraid to say ‘yes,’ but I knew I’d have to,—about the operation, I mean,—if I ever was to find out about my father, so I just—well, you see, it’s just this way, Dr. Brown, I can’t explain it ’xactly, but I—”

“Well, Jim, what is it?” questioned the doctor, in a helpful way.

“Well, it’s the trees. You see, they’re like real people to me. Ever since I can remember I’ve told ’em things. They make me feel better, somehow, whenever I’m with ’em, and just now, when I looked up there at ’em, trying to decide what to do, I wasn’t afraid about my grandfather. They told me not to worry.” He stopped in some confusion and looked

rather ashamed. "I s'pose you think I'm silly," he shyly added.

"Far from it, my lad," kindly replied the doctor. "I think you wiser than a good many men. It seems to me that you've gotten close to nature, and the Unfailing One back of us all, man as well as nature. Tell me some more of these good friends of yours. What kind of a tree do you like best?"

"Well, the old grey oak, right there, has always been my favorite," promptly answered Jim, "and so I like all oaks better than any other kind of a tree. It was awfully hard to see it go; but now it's happened, I don't care so much as I thought I would. Kinder funny, ain't it? I guess I'd better get down there now and help Sam and Skip get those roots out. I bet they're tough things to tackle."

"No, wait," said the doctor, "I want to ask you about that operation."

"Oh, yes," and Jim sat down again, all attention.

"We'd better have it day after to-morrow, Jim. I'll telegraph for a nurse and a doctor to come from Burlington to help me and then, soon, I hope, your grandfather'll be quite himself again. You, however, will have to bear the brunt of the hard farm work from this time on. With Sam's help, of course,—for Mr. Burton will never be so strong again as he has been; and many times you'll have to decide for both, as he, up to this time, has decided for you. But I have no doubt you'll be quite

capable. You've shown so much good sense to-day I'm sure you can be relied upon."

"I don't know about that, Dr. Brown," replied the boy, pleased with the commendation, "but I'll try to do all right; till my grandfather's better, any way, and as soon as he is, we must make him send for my father. Don't it beat the Dutch, the way things turn out? He was going to tell me all about my father, this old, shut-up house and everything, on Sunday, when he had time. And now, look at him. Oh, Dr. Brown, *he must* get well! You *must* cure him! I'm glad that most of the farm's sold, anyway. For that'll make the summer's work just so much easier. I s'pose you know about the college fellers who are coming up here to-morrow or the next day? Well, now, Dr. Brown, where'd we better have that operation?"

"That's just what I wanted to ask you, Jim. I should think the room in the rear of the one he's in now would be all right. Then we can move him right back again before he comes out of the ether. Suppose we go and look at it now."

CHAPTER IV

THE STORY OF THE OLD STONE HOUSE

THE evening work on the farm was done. Sam tipped his chair back and, crossing his feet on the railing of the kitchen porch, lighted his pipe. It was his usual custom to pass a comfortable half hour in this way before going to bed. Mr. Jones had taken his place in the sick room and they had sent Ellen home for a good rest. Everything was so peaceful and quiet that before Sam knew it he had fallen fast asleep. He was quite tired out from worry and extra work. But his rest was not to be a long one. In a few minutes Blackie came flying around the corner of the house, and scampering over the lawn, sprang up in his lap. Then followed the boys, so full of subdued fun and laughter that Sam knew, as he lazily opened his eyes, his only refuge now would be in his room.

"Wal," he good-naturedly asked, as he refilled his pipe, "what's up?"

"Dad's going to let me stay all night," began Skip, and he made an ineffectual attempt to snatch Blackie from her resting place; "and you're to tell us a story."

"Oh, thet so?" queried Sam. "I wanter know."

"So do we," the boy replied. He stretched out lazily in the hammock. "All about this house, too. So go ahead and begin."

"Eh?" Sam looked in a questioning way at Jim. He, sitting on the low step, and leaning against the porch rail, was dreamily gazing up to the mysterious shadows on the mountains. "Eh, Jim," the man repeated, "who said so? Cum back ter airth ag'in an' pay 'tention. Stop yer gazin'."

Jim turned to him with a laugh. "All right, Sam, I'm here," he replied. "Yes, at last you can tell us the story of this house. Dr. Brown said it would be all right. You know we've got to open it to-morrow and air it out for the nurse and doctor, and when I told Dr. Brown and Skip's father I had never been through it, they said it was high time I had and for you to tell me all about it—Skip can hear, of course."

"Wal, I d'know's your grandpa'd—"

"Don't worry about that," interrupted Jim, "for I'll take all the responsibility, and you know, Sam, he said he was going to tell me 'bout my father on Sunday, so he wouldn't mind if *you* told me the story of the house. I just bet he wouldn't for he's always said he'd tell me about it just as soon as he thought I was old enough to 'preciate things. Seems to me I've grown to be a hundred years old since yesterday, so I'm old 'nough now if I'm ever going to be."

"I should think," laughed Sam, "that agin' et thet rate, yer'd orter be old 'nough ter be told most

anything. Wal, come in th' kitchen, then, an' light up. If I'm a-goin' ter tell this yarn, yer kin bet yer bottom dollar I'm a-goin' ter tell it right stret from th' beginnin'. So we'd better go in. It'll take some time an' I'll git th' rheumatiz if I stay out here any longer, river's kinder damp ter-night."

As they followed him, the boys nudged each other and beamed with delight. Sam loved to tell a story and this was one they had wanted to hear and he to tell ever since they could remember.

Jim carefully put Blackie in her basket at the back of the stove. Then he and Skip sat on the floor and began to whittle on some boats they were making to sail in the brook. After lighting the big lamp which hung from the ceiling, Sam drew up a low rocking-chair and, sitting down between the two boys, toasted his stockinged feet. He had taken off his shoes and the glowing coals in the open grate of the stove sent a warm and cheerful hue over all.

"Wal," he began, "this house wuz a-buildin' long before th' war, when Jim's grandpa and my father, name wuz Thomas Evers, cum along up here from N' York, a-lookin' for work."

"Seems to me if they had wanted work very bad," laughed Jim, "they could have found it between New York and Pittsford."

"Wal, I don' know 'bout thet," mused Sam, "I think their health broke down from workin' too hard in th' city. Wal, anyway, they cum a-trompin' along an' when they got's fer's this place, they jest nat'chllly took root. They wuz both on 'em car-

penters, an' smart, likely chaps, too. Mr. Burton wuz a master carpenter, an' my father wuz his 'prentice. He wuz seventeen an' t'other wuz twenty. Thar hed bin some difficulty 'tween th' boss builder of this house, he owned it, too, an' some of th' men. He'd only let 'em work jest when and whar he wanted 'em to. He hed a norful temper an' would discharge any one he didn't take a fancy to, right on th' spot in a minute. Th' house wuz up ter th' second story an' th' boss workin' on it all alone when Mr. Burton an' father hove in sight. They'd bin boardin' fer a spell in Pittsford an' o' course hed heard tell of th' crazy man an' his house. So, havin' nothin' else on hand one pleasant arternoon, they walked out here ter see what wuz a-doin'. Old man Crooker, thet wuz his name — he'd bought th' land th' year before an' cum from parts ter th' south ter farm it — wuz havin' a mighty hard time 'ith beams an' things he couldn't hist alone. So, Mr. Burton an' father, bein' good-natured an' willin' an' hevin' no grudge agin him, offered to help. Thet's how it began. They worked till dark thet day an' I guess it didn't take old man Crooker long ter see they wuz good carpenters all right, fer he engaged them to come th' next day. Of course they wuz advised not to, but they did. An' they kep' on, tew. He paid 'em reg'lar an' said he'd sont fer his relatives ter help him out an' if they'd stay till he wuz fixed he'd make it all right with them. So they stayed, an' arterward, too. They rigged up kind of a tent an' shack

arrangement on th' slope of th' mountain, jest over th' bridge, an' stayed till cold weather sot in. By thet time they'd earned some money an' what wuz better, they found they wuz both well — plumb healthy, both on 'em — sound as a rivet. Outdoor air in Vermont carn't be beat, I tell yer, boys, an' I s'pose 'twas th' same then as now. Wal, thar wuz high jinks, you bet, while th' house wuz a-build-in' thet summer an' fall.

“ Th' natives, who'd helped till th' outsiders cum, wanted ter continue on th' job, fer 'twas good money an' work both. So they objected ter Crooker's bringin' in his own folks. But he said he didn't care, he guessed he'd build his house 'thout th' help o' any pryin' Yankees, an' he done it. They tried ter hender him all they could, but 'twa'n't no use, he won out. An' his relations cum, four men 'sides himself. Brothers an' cousins, an' he wouldn't let no one else, 'sides our folks, step foot within a hundred yards of th' place. He took turns with his own people, watchin' out at night with a gun. Mr. Burton an' father must a-been perty foxy th' way they managed him an' his crowd, an' th' natives, too, fer they kep' on good terms with everybody. An' old man Crooker treated them same's he treated th' discharged ones. They wuz allowed to work only when an' whar th' boss pleased. But he treated 'em decent, they wuz makin' money an' learnin' more about their trade all th' time, so they stayed. Bymby, Crooker's wimin folks cum. Then, 'twant long before th' big house wuz fur-

nished from top ter bottom with th' best there wuz in th' furniture line frum N' York, Bostin, an' Montreal. When they wuz done they put out a sign, 'The Grey Oak Inn,' an' wuz ready fur bisniss. In a short time th' hotel wuz known far an' wide. People, comin' across th' mountains, would stop on their way to Lake Champlain sight-seein', or t'other way round, an' those who went or cum frum Canady, sometimes would stay over to view th' scenery an' enjoy Mis' Crooker's prime cookin'. She could bake th' best pies yer ever see, or tasted," he added, as an afterthought. "By thet time, my father, who'd gone back ter N' York, wuz married, an' Mr. Burton, who'd stayed here, had married Mis' Crooker's second cousin an' bin taken into th' hotel bisniss."

"Why," interrupted Skip, "you said there were brothers and cousins. I should think they'd have come first."

"But it turned out they weren't no relation 'tall," chuckled Sam. "They wuz ready-made fer th' 'casion, an' arterwards turned back ter what they had bin before, about th' cleverest band o' counterfeitters in all th' United States, an' old man Crooker wuz th' boss."

The boys, who long ago had dropped their whittling, drew nearer the story teller.

"Oh, Sam," cried Skip, "honest?"

"Yep, an' this hotel bisniss wuz jest a blind ter give folks a reasin 'bout his bein' here. Yer see, it wuz mighty handy ter th' Canadian border, an'

they made both American an' English money, or what passed as sich. An' then Crooker'd got so much saved up, he could afford ter take things easy an' he jest loved th' country an' farmin'. No one suspected th' truth, till all of a sudden th' United States Marshall swooped down on Pittsford one night an' swore in some dep'ty sheriffs an' started out ter arrest th' hull gang."

"Where was my grandfather, then?" asked Jim.

"Wal, I'll hev ter go back a bit. I've told my story too fast. Old man Crooker'd deeded his farm 'n everything he possessed ter his wife, an arter thet th' second cousin wuz ter inherit. She thet wuz yer grandma, yer know. He'd kep' it so secret, however, thet yer grandpop never knew a thing, either 'bout thet, or th' old man's real bisniss. An', when th' hotel trade would be kinder slack, an' they seemed ter need more money, he'd go off an' work at his trade fer a spell. He wuz away on a trip of this kind when th' partners cum fer one of their usual visits. They wuz always careful to cum when th' coast wuz clear of Mr. Burton, too. Wal, they wuz all hard at work a-counterfeitin' when th' Marshall an' his sheriffs arrived."

"But, Sam," interrupted Jim, "how could they work and no one find it out even if grandpa wasn't there? I should think they'd leave signs of some kind around."

"I'm a-comin' ter all thet, jest you give me time," answered Sam, and he leaned down to shake the fire. "I won't forgit nor leave out a blessed thing. Wal,

yer grandma 'n Mis' Crooker wuz a-settin' on th' porch with one of th' 'cousins,' when all of a sudden, th' men frum th' village hove in sight. They rid up so silent thet before th' wimmin knew it, they wuz prisoners, for of course it wuz supposed they knew all about it, but they never, not a single thing, till they wuz told arterwards. So they wuz locked up in one o' th' settin' rooms till th' shootin' wuz over."

"Oh," breathed Skip.

"Must hev bin kinder lively fer a few minutes," mused Sam, smiling in a satisfied way at the success of his story, "fer th' 'cousin' drew his revolver an' before they could stop him, fired five shots right stret up in th' air as fast's he could, one right after th' other. Then he dropped dead. Th' Marshall thought *he'd* shot him, when he let his own gun go off, but he hadn't. He hed a weak heart, they found out arterwards, an' th' last thing he did, before he died from th' excitement, wuz to warn his partners. 'Twas s'posed thet wuz th' reason he fired off those shots, fer he certainly didn't aim at nobody. Wal, this rumpus over, th' men surrounded th' house as fast's they could, an' when they reached th' barn, there wuz old man Crooker, a-milkin' th' cow as cool as you please. Wa'n't he a cute one? 'Hullo,' he said, when they crowded in at th' door, 'want to put yer horse up? Be thar in a minute.' He never turned a hair. Wal, they nabbed him, you bet, an' thet made three. The first one had been caught passin' some of th'

worthless coin off, to Portland, an' wuz so scared he give th' hull thing away. Thet's how th' gov'-ment found out Crooker's whereabouts. They'd bin layin' fer him fer some time. So they promised this man an easy sentence fer tellin' an' he got out of jail soon fer good behavior. I guess he wuz what people call 'a fence.' But he couldn't hev told much, anyway, fer he'd never seen th' secret room. We read about him not so very long ago in th' newspapers. He's bin sent ter th' lunitic 'sylum — crazy as a loon. Th' paper says he's determined ter kill some one but they can't make out who, so hev locked him up ter keep him from murderin' th' hull cummunity. But I guess th' real gist of th' matter wuz that he must hev been so awful lonesome, no one havin' anything ter do with him, that he jest went crazy. Wal — ter git on with my yarn. They wuz a takin' old man Crooker around ter th' front of th' house ter tie him ter a hoss an' lead him ter th' village lockup, when some more shots wuz heard on t'other side of th' bridge. Number Four wuz caught. One of th' dep'tys got him but he hed ter shoot him first."

"Killed him?" asked Skip, with a little shiver of excitement.

"Nope, but he died in th' jail, soon arterwards. An' th' fifth one they never found. Number Four said he'd run on an' escaped, but if he did he made th' cleanest and quickest get-away ever heard tell of in these parts. No one's ever seen hide nor

hair of Job Greenough since. Wal, it's gittin' kinder late, ain't it?"

"Oh, Sam, don't stop now," pleaded the boys, and Jim added, "I'll work harder than ever, tomorrow, Sam, even if I am sitting up later than usual to-night, only please do finish."

Nothing loth, Sam good-naturedly settled back in his chair again, saying as he did so, "Wal, see that yer do when th' time fer action comes. I s'pose I might's well finish an' git it over with, too. Thar ain't so very much more, anyway. Old man Crooker jest closed his lips tight's he could an' from that day ter th' day he died, never mentioned th' subject ter a livin' soul. Th' authorities sont fer Mr. Burton, who wuz ter Albany, and he cum's quick's he could, an' got here jest in time ter see his wife before she left him."

"What'd she do that for?" interrupted Skip.

"Couldn't help herself, my boy. She died. Her baby, your father, Jim, wuz only a few days old. Purty tough, warn't it? Th' shock of th' whole business, coming like a flash of lightnin' out of a clear sky, wuz more than she could stand. Fer that wuz th' very furst she'd known of it, an' she'd always called th' old man her pa. Fer some time after this, your grandfather wuz purty nigh crazy. He wuz under suspicion, of course, an' hed ter work night an' day an' good an' hard, before th' Gov'ment declared its belief in his innercence. After a while, however, they did, an' though they cum mighty nigh

confiscatin' everything, they finally allowed of him ter inherit. But by thet time his money hed all gone and all he did git wuz th' farm, an' it's bin purty hard scrambling ever since. Wal, he'd taken such a mortal aversion ter th' house, his wife dyin' there, an' all, thet he shut it up an' built th' extension. He sont fer my father ter cum an' help, so thet's th' way I happened here. I wuz a baby then an' pa an' ma wuz glad of a chance to raise me in th' country. So we cum, a-totin' all our things an' when th' old folks died, Mr. Burton buried 'em alongside his wife in th' village cemetery. Yer pa an' I, Jim, grew up tergether. Mis' Crooker took care of him's long as she could stand it. Yer see, they wuz all bein' watched by th' Gov'ment, an' it made her so nervous it finally broke her spirit. So she left an' went to live right under th' walls of th' prison, an' when her husband at last wuz free, th' furst thing they did, wuz ter commit suicide. He couldn't stand bein' found out an' she didn't have 'nough gumption ter go contrary ter anything he said. Wal, ter go back a spell. When the Gov'ment found out thet he warn't goin' ter tell 'em nothin' 'bout th' counterfeitin' plant he wuz s'posed ter hev here, they cum an' turned things upside down gener'lly. Th' didn't see anything incriminatin' in th' house. A few tools an' a machine wuz found tucked away in th' wood-shed, 'nough ter keep 'em frum searchin' further, an' they pretended they hed found out all there wuz to find out, but no one believed 'em. Else, why did they advertize fer Job

Greenough, th' fifth partner? An' why did they keep a watchin' of an' a pesterin' th' one they called a fence? An a tryin' ter make him confess? Th' account in th' paper th' other day spoke of that time an' said as how 'twas thought that th' constant watchin' of him then hed mor'n anythin' else to do with sendin' him ter th' 'sylum. Wal, they offered a reward fer \$500 fer th' capture of Job Greenough, dead or alive; hasn't ever been claimed. Nor th' extry \$500 fer th' discovery of any more tools or machinery, either. So, fellers, if you could make thet crazy man talk sense, or if you can find out what th' United States detectives couldn't there's a reward of a thousand dollars waiting fer you. An' though no one could trace it to its source, ever since I can remember, I've heard tell of th' rumor about th' secret room in th' house, thet, once found, would tell th' hull story.

"An' now it's time fer bed, *I tell yew*. Why, it must be all o' ten o'clock. I'll close up; but jest you bear this in mind, young fellers, how hard th' way of th' transgressor *is*, an' more'n thet, see th' sorrow th' counterfeiters brought on innercent wimmin an' children's well as punishment ter themselves."

"My, but I'm stiff," laughed Skip, as he scrambled to his feet. "Thank you ever so much, Sam, it's a bully story. And you bet I'll be content with only what *real* money I can make, and honestly, too. What are *you* thinking about, Jim; what makes you look so sober?"

"I was wondering if my father ever tried to get that reward. Did he, Sam?"

"Yer'll hev ter arsk yer granddad 'bout thet," answered the man, in a noncommittal way. "I carn't tell yer nothin' 'bout yer pa. Now, git along ter bed, *dew!*"

"Well, whether *he* did or not, I know *I'm* going to hunt for that reward," said Jim. He lighted a candle and preceded his friend up the steep stairs to his little room. "For, as I've already said, I'll need all the money I can get to help me find my father with. And if you'll hunt, too, Skip, of course you'll come in for your share, as well. Will you?"

"You better believe I will," laughed the boy. "When can we begin? It will be the greatest fun we've ever had, won't it? Of course the money'll all belong to you, Jim, I wouldn't think of taking a cent. The fun of the search'll be all the reward I'll ask for. And if we *do* find the secret room, we can play burglars and all sorts of things, can't we?"

"Uh, huh," sleepily answered Jim. "I only hope my grandfather won't tell me I can't. But I don't believe he will. When he finds I know all about it, I guess he'll be willing for me to *hunt* anyway. And I might find what the others didn't. Well, I'm too sleepy to talk about it any more to-night, but we'll begin the first thing in the morning to look for that thousand-dollar reward. Do you s'pose we'll find it?"

CHAPTER V

THE SEARCH FOR THE SECRET ROOM

TRUE to his promise, Jim was up long before his usual time the next morning. Leaving Skip, and, in the next room, Sam, both sound asleep, he softly stole downstairs. As he tiptoed over the yellow painted floor of the kitchen his bare feet made no sound, and soon he was running through the dew-sparkled grass to the barnyard. Blackie scampered after him. A few clucking hens scattered right and left from his path. At the barn door he stopped and turned to watch the early morning sun peer at him as it rose slowly over the awakening hills. The sky was without a cloud and indicated clear, though warm weather. It was very pleasant standing there in the fresh glow of a new day, but certain impatient sounds from within told Jim of his duties and if he wished to help Sam, he must begin work at once. So, unhasping the door and rolling each side back on its iron wheel and groove, he stepped into the big, cobwebby barn. The left side was filled with hay lofts, now almost empty, and a small harness room. On the other side, facing the center, were the feed bins and stalls for Judge and Nelly, who now stamped and rattled their head-gear over their mangers as they whinnied for

their breakfast. At the far end of the barn, near the other big doors, which Jim soon opened, was fastened "Lazy Bones," the cow. When released, she slowly made her way out to the barnyard and stood beneath an apple tree, waiting to be milked. This tree leaned over a moss-covered stone wall, and was one of many in an old orchard. At the foot of most of the gnarled trunks were wooden coops, from which, as Jim freed them, came many fussing hens and chickens, all clamoring for something to eat.

"Shoo, shoo," laughed Jim. He hurried among them to the edge of the orchard where a net enclosure, jutting out into the brook, made a fine home for a number of yellow geese and ducklings. "Wait, you old biddy, you're a regular 'fuss budget.' Wait, till I can let your cousins out and then I'll feed you all at the same time," he said to a particularly noisy hen. "I wonder if hens and ducks are related anyway," he thought. "I'm sure I don't see why they shouldn't be. Now then, biddy, you greedy old thing, here's your breakfast. Come, biddy, biddy, biddy!" And, scattering a goodly supply of grain on the grass and filling the pans with fresh water from the brook, he left the hens and ducks pecking at their meal and at one another, and hurried back to the barn. Here, he discovered Skip, who, still rubbing his sleepy eyes, was busily engaged in feeding the horses.

"Good for you," said Jim, and he sat down to milk the cow.

"You might have called a feller, Jim," his friend answered. "I meant to help, all right, only I had such a hard time waking up." He leaned down in the doorway and played with Blackie who was waiting for the warm milk she always had given her at this time.

"There's hardly work enough for two," answered Jim. "I wanted you to sleep, if you could. No need for us both to get up so early as I did. Will you feed Cuba now? Then we'll be through."

"Why do you call the pig, Cuba?" asked Skip.

"Because she's almost wise enough to care for herself, like the island, but not quite," laughed Jim. "Sam named her."

"He's a funny man, isn't he?" Skip replied, starting out to the pigpen with the pail of meal and scraps which had already been prepared by Jim. "I left him in the kitchen getting breakfast. Does he always do the cooking?"

"Yes, the breakfast. Grandpa cooks the dinner and I do the supper; that is, when I don't forget," he laughed. "But now I s'pose Sam'll do grandpa's part, though I guess I could, at a pinch. It's funny, grandpa's not being willing to have any one 'cept men and boys in the house, isn't it?"

"Yes, why do you s'pose it is?"

"Sam says it's because he can't bear to see any one in my grandmother's place. Well, come on! Hope breakfast's ready for I'm hungry as a bear."

"And then, hurrah for the counterfeiters' den,"

cried Skip. "I looked in your grandfather's room when I came downstairs and pa says he's just the same."

"Yes," Jim replied. He walked soberly toward the house, carrying the pail full of rich, yellow milk. "I spoke to him and took his hand, too, but he never moved. So if we *do* make a noise in the house he won't know it. And, Skip, I've just got to find that secret room, if there *is* one, even if we have to knock a wall down. I dreamed about it last night. I dreamed I'd found it and that the crazy counterfeiter had swallowed the key, after locking me in. Did you dream anything?"

"Nope; never knew a thing till Sam called me. Oh, I'm a fine sleeper all right," he laughed. "I never have time to dream, I'm so busy sleeping."

During breakfast the boys talked of nothing save the secret room and were sadly disappointed when Sam insisted that the work be finished on the oak tree first.

"No siree," he said in answer to a protest from Jim, "you must clean up the tree furst, Jim, or th' work never'll be done an' I ain't a-goin' ter hev no city doctor an' trained nusses, wimmin folks, too, a-comin' into no messy yard like that. Yer grandpa'd be mad at yer."

"Well," Jim answered, "I s'pose you're right, Sam." He pushed his chair from the table. "If I go out now, will you do the dishes?"

"Yep, jest you skeedaddle an' leave th' kitchen ter me, and," he added under his breath, "if yer

ain't purty much surprised in about a minute, I'll miss my guess."

The boys reluctantly walked through the hall to the front of the house. When they stepped out on the porch, such a welcome sight met their gaze they could scarcely believe their eyes. Not a vestige of the tree was to be seen. The hole made by the roots and trunk had been filled in, tramped down and sodded. The lawn was smooth and clean as usual. Both it and the road in front of the house looked, Jim said, "As though they had been raked with a fine-toothed comb."

"Well, there!" laughed Skip. "I want to know! Who did it? They're the best ever, anyway, whoever they are; don't you think so, Jim?"

The other did not answer at once. Instead he climbed one of the piazza's pillars and looked up the road. Then, dropping down beside his companion, he said: "The Italians did it. There they go, now, in their cart."

"Yes, boys," said Mr. Jones, who joined them for a moment on his way home, "they were so sorry when they found out what they'd done, that they came back last night to ask if they might clean up. So I said 'yes.' You had gone to bed, Jim, but I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Mind!" The boy looked up at him with a cheerful grin. "I'll try to get over it." They all laughed.

"Wal, here air th' keys." Sam, who had come up just then, thrust them into the boy's outstretched

hand. To Skip he gave a lighted candle in a glass chimney. "It'll be dark at th' end of th' hall," he added, "but look out thet yer don't set nothin' afire. Open all th' windows an' blinds an' leave them so. Thar's some of th' top story rooms I ain't never bin in, your grandpa never thought 'twas necessary to open 'em all, but this warm sunlight's jest th' thing ter dry out all those musty corners up thar, so off yer go!"

The boys started eagerly for the stairs. Then Jim turned. "Will you come with us, Sam?" he asked.

"No, most of it's an old story to me, my boy. I've aired an' dusted up thar all I want to, thank yer. I'll stay with yer grandpa an' ketch th' ghosts as you send 'em down." He disappeared with a laugh into the sick room.

Mr. Jones was now well on his way toward home, so the boys, glad to do their exploring alone, ran up the broad, low stairs to the gloom of the second story.

At the top of the staircase they paused, uncertain which way to turn, for, crossing the hall, which ran directly over the one on the first floor, was another and longer passage. This led to the shadowy ends of the house. At last Jim decided the question. He went to the window which was over the door leading to the kitchen and pulled up the sash. Then he unbarred and threw back the heavy, wooden shutters and looked out toward the glen. The peaked roof of the extension was on a level with

the window-sill. But as the cool, fragrant breath from the hills and the light of the hot sun could not penetrate far through the one window, the boys, still keeping together, hurried to the other end of the hall to open the window there. Then, running down the passageway toward the village, they also opened a storm door. This gave on a small, railed-in balcony and thus let still more welcome light and sunshine in to dispel the gloom and murk which had gathered during many quiet years. The boys needed the encouragement of all the sunlight they could get. The noiseless, mysterious rooms behind the white walls seemed filled with all sorts of secrets. And then Jim fitted the key to the door nearest the balcony, but before he could turn it, Skip exclaimed:

“Don’t do that yet, Jim, let’s begin at the top. Then we can work our way down, and we haven’t opened the window at the other end of this passage yet, either. If we do that, we’ll make a draught and then the air’ll be better.”

“All right, we’ll do that first and then, which staircase shall we go up? For there’s one at each end of this long hall.”

“That’s so, for the one in the center of the house doesn’t go up to the third floor, does it? Well, I’ll tell you what. You go and open the window. I’ll wait for you here and then we’ll both be at the foot of a staircase. Let’s go up and meet on the floor above.”

“But s’pose it’s arranged differently up there?”

“Then that will be an adventure,” laughed Skip.

"All right, if you're not afraid of 'spooks,' I'm sure I'm not," answered Jim. He turned and ran to the other end of the passage. In a few minutes he was leaning out of the window, looking across the brook to the mountain, and Skip had to call him more than once before he started to mount the circular staircase which led to the third and top story. He had scarcely arrived when he gave a little cry of fright and grasped the frail banister rail with shaking hand. His heart seemed to leap up in his throat. For there, out of the heavy atmosphere at the other end of the dark hall, appeared a flickering, thin light. To the boy's frightened eyes it seemed to fly back and forth like a will-o'-the-wisp, the fairy of his younger days in which, at times, he still almost believed. Then, with a sigh of relief, he went forward to meet it. It was the candle which Skip now held above his head and waved from side to side.

"What's the matter?" Skip exclaimed. "You look's though you had seen the ghost of the lost counterfeiter. You're awful white."

"It was the candle," Jim said, with a short, nervous laugh. "I didn't know what it was at first. Why didn't you open the window at the top of the stairs; or shout or something to let me know you were coming?"

"Forgot it, I was so curious to see whether you'd —"

"Well, do it now," interrupted Jim. "And I'll open the one at my end."

Up here, on the third floor, the ceiling was so low and the silence so intense the boys felt far away from the busy world all around them. They hurriedly opened the window at either end of the long hall, and then they both leaned from the one which looked on the bridge and the road which crossed it. The world had never seemed so attractive to them before.

"I'll tell you what the matter is," at last said Jim. "Outside the world is making such a noise, just living, that we can't bear the stillness of the dead in here."

"My, Jim, how you talk," giggled Skip. He blew out the candle and set it on the window-sill. "No one's dead in there." He gave a backward nod.

"Yes, there is, memories and things and we're stirring the ghosts of 'em all up and they don't like it. That's why the house is so 'spooky,'" answered the other. He looked curiously at the broad window-sill. "Say, Skip," he continued, "this is funny. This window's got both outside and inside blinds."

"Well, so's the one just beneath it," his friend said. He turned and tried the handle of the door nearest him. "And so have the windows of the room your grandfather's in. I don't see anything so funny in that."

"But the other hall windows haven't and I don't believe the rooms have, either."

"Well, perhaps the old counterfeiter found it

would be too expensive to do that all through the house, so stopped when he'd done part of it that way. You know Sam said he built the house by 'fits and starts, mostly fits.' I s'pose he meant temper. But let's go in the rooms now and see what we can find."

"And drive the 'spooks' away," laughingly replied his chum. "I tell you what, Skip," the boy added as he unlocked the door to the corner room and pushed it open, "I've made up my mind to one thing, and that is, I'm not going to live in the extension any longer."

"What'll your grandfather say to that?" asked Skip.

"Don't know yet, but it seems a pity to be cooped up there when all these nice rooms are furnished and ready to use. What was this one, I wonder?"

Guided by the light, which came streaming in through the open door, they made their way carefully past many big pieces of furniture to the one window, which, like that in the hall, was encased between inside and outside blinds. This, after many tugs and pulls and pushes, was finally opened and then the character of the room was revealed. It was plain to be seen that Mr. Crooker had used it for a storeroom and carpenter shop, though why he should have done so, when he had so many out-buildings at his command, seemed, to the boys, at least, a queer arrangement.

Deep, white-painted wardrobes lined the walls, and on each was painted in black letters its special

purpose. The one marked "papers," Jim opened. When the dust had settled he found that the shelves contained complete files of daily and weekly papers, with a few farmer's journals, of many years ago. These were neatly piled on the shelves. Indeed, the orderliness of all the closets they looked into, impressed the boys very much.

"He must have been a queer old chap," said Jim. He closed the closet door and ran his eye hastily over the carpenter's bench and tool-chest, to the many old-fashioned pieces of furniture still waiting to be mended. "See, here's an easy chair, and a lamp on a table close by, too. I s'pose he used to come up here to rest and read sometimes. What you doing, Skip?"

"Trying to get into this last closet we haven't opened," answered his friend, vainly endeavoring to open a door marked "old clothes." "I thought perhaps we could find some old soldier suits or something to dress up in and surprise the girls."

"That's a good idea," replied Jim, "but let's come back to do that. The morning's getting on and I want to finish opening the house before dinner. Let's just get a general idea of things and then do it all over again, one room at a time, if we want to."

"All right." Skip left the key in the lock of the closet and went back into the hall with Jim. In a few minutes they had opened all the doors and windows on that floor. The most interesting room, however, was the one they had first entered. It

reflected to a great extent the character of the attractive but misguided old counterfeiter. The other rooms, which were arranged as sleeping apartments, were furnished in heavy, black walnut of the first half of the nineteenth century, and proved to be, after two or three had been examined, quite monotonous. The boys soon ran down to the second story. This they reached by the winding stairs at the end of the hall toward the village. The rooms they now entered were larger and more elaborately furnished, and, when the warm sunlight came in through the open windows, looked so attractive that Jim more than once wished he were one of a large family and they all lived here. By degrees they worked their way, opening all the doors and windows on both sides of the hall, to the center of the house. Here they met Sam coming up to them.

"Look out th' windy, boys," he said.

They raced to the window over the front door and could just see, in the middle of the road, for the piazza roof cut off a nearer view, the tops of several covered carts and the heads of some people in two automobiles.

"The college people," cried Skip. "Oh, Jim, they've come!"

"Yep, you've struck it," said the man, answering the exclamation. "Ain't yer 'bout ready ter come down? The boss'll be back soon. He jest stopped now, long 'nough ter ask whar th' boys thet wuz a-goin' ter help him wuz, an' when I said yer wuz

up here, a cleanin' house, he larfed an' said as how he'd come back in 'bout half an hour."

"Then that'll give us a chance to open up these last rooms toward the brook and wash a little, too," said Jim. "This kind of work's awfully dusty. Come on and finish, Skip. You, too, Sam."

"Nope. I'm busy down here, a-fixin' things fer th' doctors. Yer hain't opened any o' these downstairs rooms yet, Jim, either."

"We'll do that in a jiffy," answered Jim. "It won't take us more'n five minutes up here." Sam went downstairs. The boys returned to their work of investigation. Yet when they reached the corner room and looked up on the mountain to the site of the camp and saw the animated picture before them, they spent more than twice five minutes there. It was hard to leave. It was as though they had reserved seats at some kind of a performance.

"I'm just awfully glad they've come," laughed Skip. "Just s'pose your grandfather hadn't sold the farm."

"Yes, I'm glad, too, and it certainly looks as though we'd have some new kind of fun this summer, doesn't it?" replied Jim. "I wonder how much those fellows know about farming, anyway. Not so much as they think they do, I'll bet."

"And not so much as they'll know by fall if they stick it out so long as that," replied Skip. "Well, come on. We've opened the last room. Shall we go down now?"

"Yes; and, Skip, this room has double shutters

to its windows, just like the ones above and below it. And this is the only part of the house that has. Don't you think that's queer?"

"Nope," said the other. "It only proves what I told you before. Old man Crooker found it would cost too much to put double shutters to all the windows so stopped when he built this part of the house."

"Maybe. P'r'aps he and his wife used this for their room," mused Jim. "And after every one else was asleep, I guess he used to read or mend furniture up in the carpenter shop. I can just see him now stealing up the winding stairs, can't you?"

"No, I can't say I do, Jim. You know you are the greatest feller *I* ever saw for seeing things no one else would ever think of."

Jim laughed. "I'd like to know where the secret room is, though," he said. "I'm not able to see *that*, anyway. Are you?"

"What a silly I am," Skip replied. "Jim, I'd forgotten all about it."

"Had you? I hadn't. But I bet I know where to hunt for it."

"You do? Well, then, tell me. *I* don't see where it can be."

"Not yet. It's my secret till we've opened the ground floor rooms. Then, if we don't find it down there, or in the cellar, I will."

By this time the boys had reached the porch. A hasty glance up the road showed them that one of the campers, accompanied by a girl about their own



The silence was so intense that the boys felt far away from the busy world all around them.

size, was walking back toward the house, so they ran around to the extension to wash the dust from their hands and brush their clothes before meeting the man from the city for whom they expected to work during the summer.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW FRIEND

“JIM, I guess we kin spare some milk night an’ mornin’ all right, carn’t we?”

The boys, who were busily brushing their clothes, looked up to see Sam usher into the kitchen, through the side door, the strangers who had just come from the college camp on the mountain.

“This is Miss Helen Lyford and her father, boys,” Sam continued; “Mr. Lyford’s th’ boss of th’ camp an’ wants us to spare him milk twice a day all summer. I told him that, between our cow an’ some from your father’s, Skip, I thought we could fix him out, all right.”

“So far’s I know, Mr. Lyford,” said Jim, after greetings had been exchanged, “you can have milk from us, for ‘Lazy Bones’ is fresh just now; but it’ll depend on what the doctor says about my grandfather. I s’pose you know about the accident, sir? They may want him to only have milk to drink and if that’s so I don’t see how we can spare any.”

Skip suggested that one farm supply the morning milk while the other send up that from the afternoon’s yield. And the matter was thus arranged.

Jim looked at Helen and thought he had never seen such a pretty girl before. He wanted to ask

her lots of things about the city and if she thought she'd like it up on the mountain but somehow he couldn't manage it. He had never felt so bashful before; and an awkward pause followed the arrangement about the milk. Then Skip, who was so used to girls that a new one meant nothing to him, began to talk to her in an easy, natural way and before Jim realized it he, too, found himself asking and answering many eager questions. His head just whirled, he wanted to know so many things about the city; and it seemed strange to him that Helen should be just as curious about his part of the world. Sam grinned at them in an amused way and Helen never knew she had been talking to the most bashful boy in the county, nor that she had cured him of a state of mind that had often caused him much unhappiness. Soon, Blackie appeared at the screen door, asking, in her soft, purring manner, to be introduced. They went outside to get her and when Jim saw the gentle way in which Helen picked up and held his pet, he knew, that in spite of what he thought of her "standoffish, citified ways," she was "an all right girl."

The boys also liked Mr. Lyford. His keen, blue eyes had a merry twinkle and his pleasant face assured them of a good disposition. They sat together in the shade of the kitchen maples and he outlined their duties for them. Skip agreed to all his plans, but Jim, of course, felt that he would have to wait till his grandfather was better before he could promise Mr. Lyford anything.

"That's quite right," assented the man. "Mr. Jones has told me about Mr. Burton and I appreciate just how you feel and shall not expect you to join our forces till things are happier at home. Well, we are very glad to get up in this beautiful country, boys, my family as well as the students; for my wife and little daughter Gertrude are also with me. You must come up and get acquainted to-morrow. Just at present they are all taking this afternoon off, in which to rest up, and Gertrude isn't very strong, anyway. She's only six years old and her mother persuaded her to stay with her this afternoon. Helen and I are the only ones energetic enough to do any investigating to-day. So," he added, "if you are not needed this afternoon, Jim, I thought you might like to guide us through the glen. It looks so attractive we want to plunge right in and begin to see things."

Jim's eyes sparkled. "I'd just love to do that," he answered. "And I'm sure I can, too, for Dr. Brown said he'd meet the nurse and doctor and bring them up after dinner. So I won't have to go for them and as soon as I've opened the ground floor rooms I'll be free till milking time."

"Good! Then we'll take this pail of milk Sam's just brought and go back to camp. We'll return for you about two o'clock. Will that give us time to go up to the end of the glen and get back by six?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Lyford, and lots over 'specially if we come home by the road. You see, the road, the

brook and the glen all follow the same general direction."

"Very well, then, we'll be on hand in good time. Will you come, too, Skip?"

"No, thank you, sir. I've been up here with Jim since yesterday morning so guess I'd better go home and help my father some before I change my boss." He grinned at the man and stood up with Jim to watch their new friends till they reached the bridge and Helen turned to wave her hand.

Jim sighed contentedly. "He's all right," he said. "No stuck up city airs about him."

"Nope, not a bit," agreed Skip. "Just as easy to talk to him as to pa. And Helen seems nice, too. Guess the girls will like her. Now come on, Jim. If we're going to open those last rooms, we'll have to get a hustle on. I've gotter get home in time for dinner."

"All right, come on, then," and the boys ran back through the kitchen to the extension end of the hall. The left hand rooms were in what Sam called, "spick and span order." He had been working hard there all the morning and now would not let the boys enter. "They air all ready fer th' doctors," he said, "an' yer carn't come in."

The boys, therefore, willingly turned their attention to the parlors, dining room, and general offices which occupied the rest of the ground floor. In a few minutes the hot noon sun was throwing patches of white light over walls and ceiling and dusty hotel furniture. Jim's task was finished.

He then lighted a candle and, followed by Skip, ran down a short flight of stone steps to the cellar. This was excavated under one-half of the house only, that part toward the brook. A slanting door, at the top of a few moldy granite stairs, opened on the side lawn. Up and out to the clear air the boys gladly scrambled, and then Jim watched his chum hurry around the corner of the house on his way to dinner while he mused over the commonplaceness of the cellar. "Nothing there, anyway," he thought. "And I didn't see any clue to the secret room on the ground floor either and Skip never spoke of it. Guess the Lyfords must have made him forget about it. Hum, I guess *I* know — now — where — to — look. Hum,— well — I will tell Skip to-morrow and then we'll set to work with a few tools and see if I'm right or not. But I guess there ain't much doubt of *that*." He backed off a few steps and looked up at the end of the old house where it met the overhanging eaves. "Yes, sir, I'm sure I'm on the right track all right, bet you anything!"

Just then Sam called him. "Here you, Jim," he said, and, leaning over the porch railing, he brandished a carving knife in such a mock heroic way that the boy laughed, "quit yer gazin, yer carn't see no stars yit. I want you should go upstairs and toss some mattresses out on th' piazza roof to toast in this hot sun. Then hang them blankets an' sheets thet air on th' hall sofy on th' clothesline so as to give 'em a good airin'. By thet time din-

ner'll be ready. Now you git a hustle on or I'll carve you up instid of th' meat."

Jim had just finished his dinner when Helen and her father arrived, and they started to walk through the glen. The boy enjoyed acting as guide very much, and found Helen such pleasant company, that in a short time when she said she was tired and wanted to go back, he felt quite disappointed.

"That's a wise thing to do, daughter," said Mr. Lyford; "I wondered how long your enthusiasm would last. But it is much better to go back now, isn't it, before you get too tired to return to-morrow with Gertrude and mother? And you know you have the whole summer before you. Have we come half way, Jim?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Lyford; why, we've just lost sight of the barn."

"Then, Helen," said her father, "you won't be afraid to go back alone, will you? Take plenty of time,—and, here, take my coat, will you? Do you mind carrying it on your arm? It's light, but I am already finding it too heavy, and shan't need it the rest of the way. Do you think I will, Jim?"

"No, Mr. Lyford, for we've got some climbing yet to do, and that's harder work than what we've done so far."

"I don't mind carrying it, father. Just give it to me. There, now I'm off. Don't get too tired yourself. Remember what mother said—to take it easy. That's why I'm going back now, for I'd just love to go on with you."

"Perhaps you can persuade her to come as far as this to-morrow, dear. I want her to see how pretty it is here. Well, I'll see you at supper time." He returned her salute by waving his hand to her. Then he stood watching her till a turn in the trail hid her from view. "These woods are perfectly safe, Jim?" he asked, half inclined to call to Helen to come back.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Lyford," laughed the boy, "why, we're over five miles from the railroad, and a tramp has never been seen in these woods. And there isn't any large game around here in the summer—'cept rabbits and chipmunks, and I guess they wouldn't harm her any."

Thus reassured, Mr. Lyford resumed his climb. Neither man nor boy saw, on the other side of the little brook, a bright pair of furtive eyes that watched them go—nor heard a slight rustle in the underbrush which indicated that there *was* game, after all, in the glen that day. A strange kind of game which also started quietly off in the direction of the farm.

Some hours later, Mr. Lyford and Jim reached the end of the glen. Here they rested, leaning against the face of a steep, rocky wall, before they began the necessary climb, through underbrush and over ferny, moss-covered ground, were they to reach the top of the cliff.

"Well, are you ready, Mr. Lyford?" at last the boy said; "I guess we had better be getting on. We've a stiff climb before us and can finish our

rest at the top. There's a fine view up there, too."

"You lead, I'll follow," replied the man. He rose to his feet and took the walking stick Jim had just cut for him. "Thank you, my boy, I think this will be a great help." And so it proved to be. The man from the city, unused to long and hard climbs, without aid would often have been forced to stop and rest before gaining the road above.

Part of the precipice was a sheer wall of granite, fifty feet high. Over this, in a shimmering river of light, fell the brook. On one side close to the sparkling water grew an impenetrable grove of hemlock and spruce, the trees towering over one another in compact rows. So Jim led the way up the other side, over moist and rocky ground.

His feet crushed through banks of pungent shield fern, whose rank growth sent up a delicious perfume. Mr. Lyford breathed it with delight. He did not speak, however, for Jim still climbed on and up, and he had to bend all his energy to keep in touch with him. At last, when he was quite out of breath, the hardest part of the climb was over. They clambered around an outcropping of rock and arrived at their objective point.

Mr. Lyford did not sit down for a long time. The magnificent view spread out before him made him forget he was tired. Jim watched his face and felt well repaid for bringing him. At last he turned to the boy and smiled. Though he said no word, Jim knew how he felt and was satisfied. Then they

sat down and dangled their feet over the slippery edge of the cliff.

"The waterfall's called 'Isaac's Leap,'" explained Jim. "A long time ago a man by that name used to live near here, and he planted some of these pine trees, and then my grandfather put in the rest. Don't they smell nice?"

They turned their backs to the waterfall and looked into a small plantation of fragrant pines and balsam firs. The trees were planted in orderly rows, not too near together, and covered about an acre of almost level ground. The brook wandered through it. Its source was in springs farther up the mountain, and the sunlight, which flickered down in patches on it, its rocky borders and the ground, completed a very pretty picture. Mr. Lyford and Jim walked for a short distance on the soft yielding carpet of pine "spills" and cones. For many years the trees had been dropping these from their old branches, and they sent up soft, sweet-smelling clouds of dust to the man who looked around him in silent appreciation. Then he said:

"How nice it is here. I hate to leave it but I'm afraid it's growing late. We must be getting back. Have you any idea what time it is? I didn't bring my watch."

Jim squinted at the sun and said it must be at least half after five, so, regretfully, they started on their homeward way. They climbed over a lichen-covered stone wall, and found themselves on the deeply shaded road which led down the mountain.

When they reached the camp, Jim thought that the busy fire, the white tents, and all the details of open-air life, with the companionship of interesting people, almost too nice to leave. Helen hadn't come back, but her mother said that they needed more milk, so one of the campers had gone for it, and she supposed he had met Helen and she had walked with him to the Jones farm. Jim was cordially asked to stay to the first camp supper. He wanted to yet decided not to stop. Dr. Brown might need him, he said, there might be something he could do for to-morrow. So, with a cheerful good-night to his new friends, he kept on his homeward way. He whistled to keep his spirits up, for the mention of his grandfather's name suddenly brought to his mind the knowledge of the next day's doings, and he wondered how he'd ever get through it.

He was half way between the bridge and the house when Skip came flying out to meet him. "Oh, Jim," he gasped, taking his friend's hand and dragging him down on the ground beside him; "don't go in! They told me to look out for you, and I 'most missed you! I thought you were coming the other way."

"What's the matter? What is it?" cried Jim, turning white with sudden fear. He trembled so he was glad he was sitting down.

"It's the operation. They are doing it now," answered Skip. "When they got here they found your grandfather was worse, so they had to begin right away. Where you going?"

While listening to his chum's excited whispers, Jim had unlaced and taken off his shoes, and now, throwing them in Skip's lap, he darted to his feet and ran as fast as he could toward the house.

CHAPTER VII

SUSPENSE

WHEN Skip overtook his chum, Jim was crouched in a troubled heap outside the closed door. On the other side of the broad, mahogany panels was happening — what? Once or twice he took hold of the door-knob, but he did not turn it. Skip brooded over him as a hen broods her chickens, and when he could stand the strained silence and Jim's terror-stricken face no longer, ran out to the barn to find Sam and bring him back to his friend.

Sam was bedding the horses and closing up the outbuildings for the night. Unheeded tears followed each other down his troubled face. In answer to Skip's request he slowly shook his head. "The live stock hes gotter be tended to furst," he said. "Then I'll come. I've neglected 'em too much as 'tis fer th' larst day or two. I'd be 'shemed ter drive th' pair ter th' village 'ith sich a dirty coat on 'em as they've got, dust's an inch thick on 'em this minute. And th' doctors said 'twould be two hours, or till seven o'clock before there'd be anything ter report. Carn't be near thet yit."

"No, it's just struck six."

"Wal, you go bring Jim an' help him do his chores. Work's the best thing goin' jest now, Skip. It don't take none of my feelin's fer Mr. Burton away, but it does keep me from worryin' too much." As the boy darted off, Sam called out to him, "and I wish you'd arsk him what under th' canopy he dun with the peck measure an' th' blanket fer Judge." Skip nodded, and Sam again turned to the grooming of the patient horses. "It does beat all," he mused, "how some folks will let any kind of excitement upset th' hull kit an' boodle o' things. But I s'pose boys will be boys till th' end of time, an' I guess Jim does as well as th' best on 'em."

A hurried visit to the house failed to persuade Jim to leave his post, however, so Skip, too nervous to keep still, ran back and helped Sam. They were glad of each other's companionship and when, the last of the work done, and they reached the house together, it was to find Jim still crouched, Turk-like, in the dim hall. Sam peered in at him and then said:

"Now, here we be, Jim boy; cum out on ther porch an' set down with Skip an' me. Yer ain't no mortal use agin thet door."

But Jim slowly shook his head. Sam and Skip, therefore, sat down on the threshold of the front door, where, shortly afterward, Skip's father joined them. He rode up on one of his horses which he tied to the fence on the other side of the road. Then he crossed over to the house.

"Well, well," he said, in a cheerful whisper. "What are you sitting here for? It'll be dark in a minute. Light up, won't you, Sam? Where's Jim?"

Sam painfully rose to his feet. His rheumatic joints cracked so loud they could be heard. Then Skip jumped up, saying, "Never mind, Sam, I'll light the lamps. Just you sit down again."

As the tired man did so, Skip turned to his father and pointed to the hall. "Jim's in there," he whispered; "where he's been more'n an hour. Can't you make him come out, pa?"

Mr. Jones gave a searching look at the tense figure. Then he shook his head. "Let him alone," he whispered, in return: "he won't have to wait much longer, now." Then, loud enough to be heard by the crouching boy in the shadow, he continued, "Sam, you remember the story of those counterfeiterers?"

"Well, I just guess he does, pa," laughed Skip, answering the question himself; "didn't he tell Jim and me all about them only last night?"

"That's so, so he did, Skip. Well, the crazy one's escaped from the lunatic asylum."

"Sure 'nough," exclaimed Sam, "I want ter know. When'd you hear?"

"Just now. The asylum telegraphed the operator at the station, and he 'phoned up to the farm. They want us to look out for him."

"What do they want us to do that for?" asked Skip.

"They can't find him, and think he's headed this way," replied his father. "Because he talked so much about—'getting even with Job.' Job Greenough was the counterfeiter who escaped, you know. And this crazy fellow seems to think Job might have kept him from the asylum if he'd only come out of his hiding place—wherever that is. He says he's here and is going to kill him."

"Gee," whistled Skip.

"So, there's something for you two boys to do," gently laughed his father, "before the authorities get here. Find the poor fellow, that is if he's around here, anywhere, and claim the reward they offer for his capture."

"Oh, is there a reward for *him*, too?" excitedly cried Skip. "Gosh, Jim, hear that?"

"Now, don't you take on too hard," chuckled Sam, "fer 'tain't no ways likely thet pore, demented feller'll ever manage ter find his way so far frum th' 'sylum. But of course I s'pose th' authorities thought they ought ter let us know."

"Yes," said Mr. Jones, "they'll telegraph us as soon as they find him, but in the meantime they ask us to be on the lookout for him."

"A crazy man," mused Skip. "I've never seen one. I wonder what he'll look like. Ain't it exciting, Jim?" And Jim replied in a low voice:

"I guess we'd know him, if we saw him, all right."

By this time the gathering twilight had deepened.

Down by the bridge a frog was croaking. In the grass near the porch a cricket began to chirp. The stars shone in the clear sky, and though it was very pleasant on the piazza, when Skip brought a lighted lamp and set it on the marble-topped table at the foot of the stairs, his father and Sam came in and sat down near by. And then Jim started to his feet. Within the room, some one moved. He could hear voices, and slow, careful steps going toward the front of the house. He joined the others, and they all looked breathlessly at the door of Mr. Burton's room. In a moment it opened and Dr. Brown came out. He smiled; then softly closing the door, stepped up to Jim.

"It's all right," he whispered. "Jim, my boy, don't look so. Your grandfather's conscious, the operation was a great success, and I have every reason to think he's going to get well. Why, Jim!" The boy, with a little, smothered cry, fell over into the man's outstretched arms. Mr. Jones thought he had fainted and ran for a glass of water, which, however, was not wanted, for, when he returned, Jim was sitting up, a bit pale and trembly, leaning against the doctor's arm.

"Oh, *I'm* all right," he said, "I was kind o' stiff, that's all, I guess. But now I feel as though I was going to cry just like a baby." He thrust his hand in his pocket for his handkerchief, and as he drew it out in a hurry and buried his face in it, something which came with it, fell with a

little tinkle on the floor. Sam mechanically stooped and picked it up, holding it to the light to see what it was. Immediately:

"Great Jumping Jehoshaphat," he cried, and he forgot the need of silence till reminded of it by the doctor. Then excitedly leaving the house and followed by the others, Sam hurried across the road to the fence where Mr. Jones' horse was tied. Here they could talk without being heard in the sick room. Sam amused them all. Never before had they seen him in such an excited condition.

"Now, Jim," he began, when they clustered around him. "Where on airth did you git this?" and he held up the gold locket and chain, which, a moment before, had been with the handkerchief in the boy's pocket. Jim explained its presence there in a few words. Sam then clutched the boy by the arm and almost danced in his agitation as he cried:

"Of course! I hev it! It's as plain as day or th' nose on your face thet th' tame crow did it."

"Did what, Sam?" laughed the doctor, while Mr. Jones added:

"You're crazy, my man."

"Purty nigh, purty nigh," agreed Sam, who, calming down somewhat, continued, "I carn't tell th' hull story of it, fer I don't know it, but, Jim, this locket an' chain'll help you to find yer father. It'll bring back yer pa to yer, or my name ain't — ain't — what 'tis."

“Come, come, Sam,”—interrupted the doctor—
“calm down and tell us what you know.”

“Well,” answered the man, “thar’s little that I *kin* tell, Dr. Brown. What I do know, however, is this: Mr. Burton prizes this locket an’ chain more’n anything he possesses, ’cause it was his wife’s. She wore it th’ furst time he ever see her. So when Jim was a baby an’ he let him wear it, an’ it wuz lost one day, he an’ his son quarreled about it. Mr. Burton, he sed some ha’sh words, I guess, yer all know how quick tempered he kin be on occasions, an’ furst thing I knew, his son had picked up an’ wuz a-leavin’. I wuz a-shinglin’ th’ balcony at th’ end o’ th’ house, so saw him go though I never let on I did. An’ when he called out: ‘I’ll never come home, ’thout thet locket an’ chain’s found,’ his father yelled back, ‘I’ll send yer word when ’tis.’ Wal, th’ young one sed nary a word ter this but kep’ right on down th’ road. An’ th’ old, tame crow he’d raised frum th’ nest, sat on th’ railin’ of th’ porch an’ croaked, ‘Caw, caw, caw.’ Gosh! I kin hear it now’s plain’s day. An’ do you know, I bet ’twas thet pesky bird what carried off thet locket an’ chain an’ hid it in th’ oak. It loved bright things. A new nail or a bit of tin’d occupy its attention half ’n hour at a time. An’ then it would pick it up an’ hop gravely off an’ hide it somewhar. Yes, *sir*, thet’s just what happened, I’ll bet a dime. Th’ old rascal lived to a ripe old age, an’ Mr. Burton a-feedin’ of it an’ keerin’ fer it th’ hull time, ’cause it wuz his son’s. He wouldn’t

let me touch it, not that I hankered arter th' job, an'— that's all I kin tell yer about it, Jim."

"Well, of course there's more to the story that we don't know," loyally answered the boy. "For I don't believe my father'd stay away all these years for a quarrel so silly as that one was, and as soon as grandpa is strong enough to know about the locket and chain, I'll make him tell me all about my father and then I'm going to hunt for him—and find him, too! When can I tell my grandfather, Dr. Brown?"

"Not till I give you permission," at once answered the doctor. "You must not think of speaking to him till I do. His recovery absolutely depends upon rest and quiet. The least excitement or strain on his sympathies would be fatal to him."

"Then you can count upon me to keep quiet," said the boy, though a wistful look came into his eyes, and he added, "It won't be easy. It's my father, Dr. Brown."

"I know it, my boy," kindly replied the doctor, "but for that very reason, just because you *do* want to find your father, you must not do or say a thing to that sick man in there to worry him." The doctor pointed to the house, and then added, "I'm sure you wouldn't do anything to imperil or hinder his recovery."

"Of course not; you know I want to help all I can," indignantly answered Jim.

"Well, Jim, you needn't worry about *that* part of it," said Mr. Jones. "I take it that all here will

agree with me when I say you've proved to be a great help already."

"You bet we do," laughed Skip, and the doctor smilingly added:

"I'll tell you this to encourage you, Jim. Perhaps in a week you can show your grandfather the locket and chain and tell him how you found it. I suppose, if the truth were known, it was your own little fingers that pulled it off your neck and handed it to the old crow. I remember now what good friends you two used to be. It's strange how things turn out, isn't it? And now, good-night. I'll just take another look at my patient and then trot along."

He returned to the house while Mr. Jones and Sam walked around to the barn to get the horse and buggy. With one exception, to those who had assisted at this moonlight interview, a week seemed a long time to wait before Mr. Burton could be told about the locket and chain and their curiosity satisfied. Jim, alone, was not impatient. He thrust his hand deep down in his pocket and closed it around the trinket. Had he not waited almost all his life to know about his father? What was one week, compared to ten years?

CHAPTER VIII

MIDNIGHT IN THE GLEN

THE boys were left alone. They stared at each other in silence for a few moments. Then Skip laughed. "Talk about living quietly in the country," he began; "I'd like to know what city could beat this for excitement."

"Who said the country was quiet?" asked Jim.

"Why, some of the fellers up at the camp, when they went by on their way to the post-office. They were in the auto and had Gertrude with them. Just before you came back from the glen. They wanted to know how we ever stood it, said they 'could *hear* the silence,' " and Skip laughed again. "Mr. Lyford's girls are all right, though, Jim. I'm going to take Sara up there to meet 'em to-morrow. I guess she and Helen'll like each other first rate. But there, such pipe-stem legs as little Gertrude has, you never did see. She looks awfully peaked, too—guess our Vermont air'll straighten her out all right, though."

Jim smiled but paid little attention to his friend's remarks. He was looking at the front of the house, now showing clear and distinct in the bright, starlit night. Suddenly he exclaimed:

“ Say, Skip, why didn’t you open all your share of the windows when we divided the work this morning? ”

“ I did.”

“ You never — or if you did, who shut the blinds on the end window of the third floor? No one’s been up there since we came down.”

Skip looked, gasped a little, and turned to meet Jim’s excited glance with one as expressive. Then they both cried at the same instant, “ The secret room! ” And Skip added, “ Oh, Jim, *do* you s’pose we’ve discovered it? ”

“ I don’t know, but it looks mighty like it,” replied Jim. “ We’ll find out for sure in the morning. That’s where I thought it was, in the corner behind the room where all the furniture and carpenter’s tools are. That room seemed ever so much smaller than the one below it.”

“ Perhaps the door to it is one of the closets we couldn’t open,” suggested Skip.

“ Yes, that’s what I think, too. Ssh — mum’s the word. Don’t say anything more about it now,” whispered Jim, as the doctor, with a smile and a nod, drove by in the buggy. Then Skip’s father came back from the barn and jumped on his horse to follow. “ It’ll be our secret,” continued Jim, in a low voice. “ Come back to-morrow as soon’s you can and we’ll go up together again.”

Skip nodded and then at a request from his father took his place on the broad back of the horse and they rode home.

Jim, thinking over the events of this busy day, walked slowly around the corner of the house. So many things had happened, one right after another, that his head was in a whirl from the excitement. He wondered if he could ever get to sleep and what made him feel so queer inside. Then he saw Sam eating bread and milk at the kitchen table and realized that he hadn't had any supper. In a few minutes he, too, was busy at the same occupation and when he finally left the room and went upstairs felt much better.

While he lazily undressed he mused over the news Mr. Jones had told them about the crazy counterfeiter and then his thoughts wandered to the secret room and as he tumbled into bed he said to himself, "And now I can plan it all out, just how we can get in there. In the first place,—” But by this time the boy's head was on the pillow, his tired eyes were closed and he was conscious of falling comfortably to sleep, in spite of his interesting plans, when he thought he heard a knock at the door.

Before he could say, "Come in," it opened and the crazy counterfeiter entered the room. Jim suddenly realized that he wasn't at all surprised to see him. He seemed to know him at once and what he had come for so he jumped right out of bed and began to help him. First, they set up the big, copper pot, that the counterfeiter had brought, on its tripod and then commenced to make blueberry pies out of gold dollars that Jim found under his pillow. As they stirred the fire in the caldron, Jim thought

it funny that they should *boil* the pies, but when the crazy man and Job Greenough, who had just flown through the window in the most natural way, as though that was the only entrance, turned to him, he suddenly knew that they were going to boil *him*!

Before he had time to turn away they reached out and caught hold of him. He struggled hard to free himself from their grasp, but they held on so tight he was afraid he'd have to be boiled after all. The fire was so near he could feel its heat on his face. Job's big hand clutched his shoulder while the crazy man grabbed both his feet. They were about to lift him up and toss him into the boiling pot which was now full of molten gold with the blueberries dancing on top when he made one desperate effort to get away. He jerked his face from beneath Job's arm and opened his mouth to scream when he found himself standing upright on his bed while Sam, who held a lighted candle, and Skip, who was also fully dressed, were both shaking him vigorously.

"Gosh," muttered Sam, as he put the candle on a chair and started to go downstairs, "I never knew a critter could sleep so sound. You tell him, Skip; and you, Jim, hurry up and git dressed as fast's you kin."

"What is it?" cried Jim. "Where's Job and —" Then he realized that he had been dreaming and that Skip was telling him to "hurry up." "What's the matter?" he sleepily yawned. He hurriedly slipped into his clothes.

"Helen's lost."

"Helen? Helen who? What's she lost for?"

"Oh, you, Jim," called Sam, from the foot of the stairs. "Ain't you ready yit?"

"Comin', Sam, comin'," answered Jim, and the boys, blowing out the candle, took the short flight of stairs at two bounds and a slide and landed in the middle of an anxious group of men standing at the screen door. It seemed to Jim, still rubbing his tired eyes, and struggling with the desire to close them again, tight, right where he was, and never open them again, he was so sleepy, that all the men in the township were there. Then suddenly he realized that something very serious must have happened or Mr. Lyford and all the college boys, Mr. Jones, his two oldest boys and Skip, would not all be there at that time of night. So he became wide awake at once and asked again, "What's the matter?"

Mr. Lyford answered. "Helen hasn't come back," he said. "No one's seen her since she left you and me this afternoon."

"Why," exclaimed Jim, "I thought her mother said that she'd gone with one of the fellers to Skip's for more milk!"

"Her mother thought she had," answered the man, with a little choke in his voice, "but she hadn't. You know Skip brought some up first, before her mother thought it was time for her to return. She thought Helen was with me, any-

way. Then, when she found she'd need another quart of milk, she sent one of the boys to Mr. Jones' for it and while he was gone you and I got back. My wife thought Helen might have gone on to the farm, or jumped in the automobile which went to the village for the mail, so it was not till all had returned, without her, that we began to worry. Then, you were so busy and anxious, here, over the operation, that we felt we could not ask you or Sam to help us look for her. But we did go for Mr. Jones and they have helped us search every foot of ground between here and the camp. We've dragged the pool below the bridge — and,—” He tried hard to control his voice but it was some time before he could add: “and now, Jim, we want you to guide us through —”

“Sssh —” A soft voice interrupted and Ellen tiptoed from out the dark hall to the dimly lighted kitchen. “You're making altogether too much noise. You'll wake Mr. Burton up. Do be quiet.” With a silent gesture she shooed them all out into the dooryard, where Mr. Jones, now speaking for Mr. Lyford, turned to Jim and said:

“No one knows the glen so well as you do, Jim, on both sides of the brook, off the trail and on, all over the little island, too. So we had to wake you.”

“I'm sorry to do so, too, after your anxious evening here,” added Mr. Lyford, “but you see —”

“Oh, Mr. Lyford,” interrupted Jim, “don't you

think of *me*. I'm rested 'nough now, anyway. What time is it? Quarter to twelve? Goodness! And she started home before four."

"Yes, yes," impatiently agreed her father. "Now what d'you think, Jim?"

"Think? I think we'd better find her. In double quick time, too. She must be awfully hungry. Come on, Skip."

"Hold on, young feller, whar you goin'?" said Sam, reaching out a detaining hand and stopping the boy who had already started to run toward the barn.

"Why," he answered, "to get the lantern. It'll be dark as a pocket in the glen."

"I'll get it; I know 'xactly where it hangs," cried Skip, as he darted off. "You do something else."

"We've got a lantern, Jim," said Mr. Lyford; "brought it from camp. And so has Mr. Jones."

"Well, we'll need 'em both, and ours, too," said Jim. "For we'd better divide in three parties. Skip'll go ahead with one up the trail, Mr. Jones had better lead some of us over the rocks along by the brook and the island, and I'll take the rest up in the woods between the camp and the trail where she left us. She may have thought she could get home quicker by taking a short cut through the woods that way. Perhaps she's sprained her ankle on a loose stone or something."

"Good boy, Jim," breathed Mr. Lyford, with a deep sigh of relief. "You've struck it just right. Of course that's what's happened. Come on, I'll

go with you. Now the rest of us divide up with Mr. Jones and Skip. And Skip, ah, here he is, too, but without the lantern. Where is it, Skip?"

"'Tain't there," briefly responded the boy.

"'Tain't? 'Course 'tis," crossly replied Sam, and he went himself to look for what he could not find. "Must be a ghost sommers 'round here," he muttered, as he had to give up in disgust and hurry after the others, who, impatient of this extra delay, had gone on without him.

In place of the much needed barn lantern, Jim had supplied himself with a lamp from the house. Mr. Lyford carried it and protected it from the overhanging foliage and thick, interwoven branches, while Jim went cautiously a few steps in advance, peering behind rocks and stumps and thrusting aside clumps of tall weeds as though expecting to find the lost child tucked away, fast asleep.

From time to time the various searching parties called to one another and, as they went further and further up the slope of the wooded mountain, they drew closer and closer together. At last they could see one another's flickering lights and soon they all joined forces. They had been unsuccessful.

"It's pitchy black, all right," exclaimed Skip and he threw himself full length on a bed of moss. The others followed his example and for a moment no one spoke. Indeed, there was nothing to say and Mr. Lyford's haggard face and frightened eyes made the others feel so bad they could only express

their sympathy in their silent attitude. They were in the same little clearing, where, only a short time before, Jim had noticed the remains of a bonfire. The dead embers were still lying about and the boy again absent-mindedly touched them with his foot. As he did so, a tightly wadded ball of some half-burned material rolled from between the logs right to his feet. He stooped and, picking it up, undid it. It was part of a brown and red striped coat and the stripes ran round, upward from the wrist; there was no cuff; first a brown one, then a red, then a brown one again.

"Hum, that's a funny kind of a thing," mused Jim. "Never saw any one wear anything like that before. I wonder how it came here in our glen. I wonder —" And suddenly, a tremendous, a startling idea came to Jim. He trembled all over at the mere thought of it and looked behind him as though afraid.

"Come on, Jim," Mr. Jones said, just then. "We're going back, down the trail, to get something to eat and see if she's gotten to camp yet. And if not, then we'll decide what to do next."

When Jim turned to take up his lamp, which he had safely placed on a flat rock, he managed to secret the half-burned sleeve within his blouse without being seen. Then he hurried on after the others, because, for the first time in his life, he knew he'd be afraid to be alone in the glen.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT JIM SAW FROM THE PINE TREE

WHEN the tired and hungry searching party reached the farm, it was after four o'clock and dawn was slowly creeping over the land. One of the campers, with Mr. Lyford, ran up to the tents to see if Helen had returned. Mr. Jones rode home on Judge to enquire there and the others sat down in the kitchen to drink the good, hot coffee and eat the ham and eggs that Ellen had prepared for them.

"The biscuits'll be ready in a jiffy," she whispered as she flew from the oven door to the table and back again. "And I'm sorry I can't give you all milk to drink and cream for your coffee, but I haven't got any too much this morning. Neither Sam nor Jim was here to milk and there isn't enough left of last night's to go round."

"I'll milk now," said Jim, pushing aside his plate. "Don't hurry, fellows, and go easy on the biscuits." As he slipped out the door Mr. Jones and the college boy passed him. They had been unsuccessful. "No — no news," he heard them say, and then, after hesitating a second at the row of shining pails hanging on the porch rail, he caught up one and hurried

out to the barn. Within five minutes he came back, but without any milk.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Ellen, and Mr. Jones, looking at Jim's excited face, hastily rose to his feet.

"What is it, Jim," he asked; "d'you find her?"

"Nope." The boy shook his head. "And no milk. 'Lazy Bones' is as dry's a bone. Some one's already milked her — and what's more — the barn door was wide open and one of the milk pails is gone. I saw that just now when I took mine."

"I wanter know!" exclaimed Sam.

"And wait, I ain't through yet," continued Jim. "Where's Mr. Lyford?"

"Still up at the camp," was the reply.

"Well, before he gets back, I want to tell you something — what *I* think about Helen," said Jim. "Here, look at this, fellers," and, in an undertone, for he was still mindful of his grandfather in the front room, the boy drew from his blouse the half-burned sleeve and handed it to Mr. Jones. From him it was quickly passed to one and then another in the little group. "This is what I found up in the glen, where we turned back, and 'twas there three days ago, only I didn't pay any attention to it then."

"Oh, shucks," scornfully answered Skip. "What's that! Only a torn sleeve. I don't see anything in that to get so excited about."

"Yes, but whose sleeve, smarty? And who,

around these parts, wears any clothes like that? Tell me that if you can."

For a moment the two boys glared at each other and then Skip chuckled, "Bully for you, kid. Bet yer I know what *you* think."

"Well, you ought to by this time," smiled Jim. He turned to Mr. Jones. "First, I lost my overalls," he began. "Then I couldn't find the peck measure'n Judge's blanket. Then we missed the halter and now the lantern's gone and last of all, some one's milked 'Lazy Bones.' Some one who wanted some clothes different from what he had, so took my overalls — one strap was broken so he took the halter for a belt. I bet yer. He was cold nights, so took the horse blankets — afraid of the dark, so stole the lantern — hungry, so milked the cow."

"Jim, you do suttinly beat all," cried Sam.

"So *I* think the crazy counterfeiter's here," cried Jim, "and what's more, I bet he's got Helen, too! Oh!—" and he clapped his hand over his mouth. But he was too late. Mr. Lyford, who had returned, stood just outside the door and had heard all that Jim had said. His face went white as a sheet. He grasped the railing of the porch and cried:

"Don't let her mother know! Now, what shall we do next? Oh, won't some one say something? I see you all think that Jim's right. I do, too, but, what shall we do?"

The men and boys, full of sympathy that they did

not know how to express, stepped up nearer to him as though to help him by their silent companionship, but they did not speak. They looked to Ellen to help them out. She did not disappoint them.

"You come right in here this minute, Mr. Lyford," she cried. And she hastily set a clean place at the table for him. "What you need most of anything just now is a good, strong cup of coffee and an egg. Here they are. Now you set right down and get at 'em. The biscuits are good, too, if I do say it as shouldn't, seeing as I baked 'em myself. Now, then, you'll feel better in a minute and then will be better able to plan things. There ain't anything so upsettin' as an empty stomach."

Ellen worked as fast as she talked and presently Mr. Lyford did feel more like himself, the kitchen was put "to rights," and when the trained nurse came from Mr. Burton's room to get her own breakfast, the anxious father joined the others out under the maple trees.

Though much talking had been done, no definite plan had been decided and they had nothing to suggest when Mr. Lyford's questioning eyes sought first one and then another for advice and counsel. "Well, we've got to do *something*," he exclaimed. "And I'm going back to the glen. Daylight may help us when the night didn't." Off he started. The others, dubiously shaking their heads, as though it were not worth while to hunt there again, straggled along the road up to the camp or down toward the Jones farm.

Jim beckoned to Skip. "What is it?" asked the boy running alongside the other as he slowly followed Mr. Lyford. "What is it, Jim? What d'you think now?"

"Well, I think," smiled Jim, "that we'd better climb a tree. Don't you?"

"Wh-why — Gee whizz!" gasped his chum. "Wh-what for?"

"'Cause he may have built a fire to keep warm and if so we can see the smoke better from the top of a tree and —"

"You're right; you've struck it," interrupted Skip. "Come on, get busy. You'll go up the big elm, I s'pose? That's the tallest."

"No, the pine by the pile of rocks farther in the glen. That's higher up on the side of the mountain. We can see more from that tree."

"All right, come on, then; but I don't see what you make such a secret of it for. Why didn't you want the others to hear, too?"

"Well," answered Jim, "I don't want Mr. Lyford to count too much on what I only *think*, 'cause I may not see anything from the top of that tree. And then — ain't there a reward offered for the one who finds that crazy counterfeiter? If there is, don't you think you and I might be the ones to get it?"

"You bet I do, come on! But I can't climb that tree, Jim."

"Well, you can boost me up from the rocks to the lowest branch and I couldn't get up there less'n

you did. That'll be worth half the reward, anyway."

"How much do you s'pose it'll be?" panted Skip as he hurried after his chum.

"I don't know," Jim answered, "but maybe 'nough for your bicycle and my ticket to New York. I've got to find my father, you know, whether grandpa gets well or not."

"Yes, and then there's the reward for the secret room and for Job Greenough, too," continued Skip. "You ain't forgetting that, are you?"

"Well, you can just bet I'm not. And now, here we are; here's the tree. And of course to find Helen's the first thing."

"Of course it is. Gee whizz! Just think how I'd feel if 'twas Sara."

"Well, boost me up, will you?"

In a few minutes, after many funny failures, Skip's efforts were successful and Jim caught hold of the lower branches of the pine tree and drew himself up out of sight. Skip could hear him scrambling and slipping and catching hold again as he steadily made his way higher and higher up the trunk of the tree which towered far above its fellows. By this time Skip had been joined by Mr. Lyford, for he had heard the laughter and noise made by the two boys and was now also anxiously waiting the result of Jim's hard climb.

Presently they could hear him coming back and he had scarcely dropped down beside them before

they asked him, "Found anything? Seen 'em? What d'you see? Where are they?"

"Yep, I've seen something — queer, too."

"What — Oh, where?" cried Mr. Lyford.

"On the little island," Jim answered. "Just before the brook leaves the glen and crosses the pasture it widens out and flows round a little island of rocks and wild flowers and weeds. Well, there's something moving over there."

"Perhaps it's a deer or a wild cat or —"

"But there's a fire there," interrupted Jim. "I saw the smoke."

"Couldn't you tell what was moving, Jim?" anxiously inquired Mr. Lyford.

"No, sir, an' I just tried hard's ever I could. I couldn't tell *what* it was, but it moved and there's a fire there. It, whatever it was, crossed the stepping stones and went down toward the barn. But I couldn't tell whether it was a man or a girl."

"Well, come on, boys," cried Mr. Lyford. "It won't take us long to find out which it is."

"Right in our own dooryard, too, almost," Jim said as he slipped off a rock and led the others out into the trail again. "Don't it beat all how —"

"Wait a minute," suddenly exclaimed Mr. Lyford. "If that *is* the crazy counterfeiter and he gets back on those rocks before we reach them ourselves, he's well protected from visitors. And if he's armed —"

"You mean, if he has a gun?" Skip interrupted.

"Yes, just that. If he has and doesn't want us to get over there and — and — my Helen is there — at the mercy of his crazy whims — what shall we do?"

"Well, now, don't you worry about that, Mr. Lyford. 'Tain't at all likely he *has* got a gun," said Jim. "If he's there, I'll bet we get him all right. So don't you worry. There's more'n one way to kill a cat. Why, s'posin' he *is* over there — he'll have to come hoppin' back across those stones to get something to eat, won't he? Perhaps to milk 'Lazy Bones' again! He can't stay over forever. That'll be our chance, provided we don't get there now before he does."

"Whatever we do, we must do quietly," replied Mr. Lyford, smiling, in spite of his anxiety, at Jim's enthusiasm. "For you never can tell what a crazy man'll do next. And we mustn't let him see us. Now, how can we get to those stepping stones without being seen?"

"Follow me, I'll show you, Mr. Lyford," confidently answered Jim.

"Well," murmured Skip, "what *I* want to know, is, how we could have missed him, just now, in broad daylight, when we came right alongside of the brook."

"There's a kind of a hollow right in the middle of the little island," answered Jim. "The rocks hide it, and that's where I saw the smoke."

"Hush! Lie down, some one's coming," whispered Skip.

With one accord all three fell flat on their faces and dragged themselves back of some tall weeds at the side of the trail. From here, they could watch, unseen, any one approaching from the direction of the farm.

In a moment there came slouching into view an old, white-faced man. He was heavy and broad-shouldered and had furtive eyes which peered from under prominent brows as though afraid of something. He was clad in Jim's overalls and when Mr. Lyford recognized his own coat, which he had placed on his daughter's arm the previous afternoon, buttoned snugly around the man's stooping form, it was almost more than he could bear. Jim's hand, which gripped his arm, alone kept him still. And when the boy pointed to a pistol which was thrust within the leather belt around the stranger's waist, Mr. Lyford could only relax his taut muscles and sink back to the ground again. They must watch and be content to wait till they could take him unaware and at a disadvantage. For though they were three and he but one, he was nearer the little island than they were, he was armed, and, notwithstanding his age, he had, probably, the unnatural strength possessed by the insane. All this the others realized as they lay hidden in the bushes, waiting for some move on the crazy man's part to give them a signal to act.

Presently, almost as silently as a snake glides along the earth, Jim crawled up to Mr. Lyford and, putting his lips close to his ear, whispered, "When

he steps out on the stones he'll be back to, then we can rush him and upset him. He can't hurt us when he's flat down in the brook, and his gun'll get wet, too."

Mr. Lyford and Skip, who had also heard, smiled and nodded their heads in approval. But when the stranger reached the stepping stones he did not cross over to the little clump of rocks and weeds in the middle of the brook. Instead, he sat down on a shelf-like rock facing the hidden watchers and drew from either pocket of Mr. Lyford's coat a pair of shoes.

"Sam's Sunday ones," breathed Jim, "left out in the wood-shed to be cleaned. D'you ever?"

The man proceeded to discard his own, worn-out pair, which he threw over his shoulder into the brook, for the newer and better ones. Evidently well pleased with the exchange, he stood up and stamped his feet down into them, smiling with the absorption of a child over a new toy.

"Now," whispered Mr. Lyford. "Now he's going."

But, no! He again sat down, this time to partake of a breakfast he had brought in the peck measure. Eggs, which he cracked and swallowed raw — and blueberries, evidently just picked, for he shook the dew from them before he ate them, twigs and all. Before he finished, however, he took several pretty clusters of berries and three eggs and placed them together in a little pile.

"For Helen," her father thought, and the tears

blinded his eyes. "She must be over there! Oh, why doesn't he start!"

As though animated by his wishes, the man did start. After using the peck measure as a cup and drinking freely of the clear, cold water which ran noiselessly by him, he dropped the measure in the brook and watched it spin round and glide off on the swift current. Then, picking up the berries and eggs and putting them in his pockets, he slowly rose and turned toward the stepping stones. Twice he glanced back and listened as though he almost knew he was being watched. Yet all was still. No one followed him, no sound broke the early morning silence of the forest. The pursuers, now sure of their success, could wait. They wanted him to reach deeper water. At last! He was half way over! The bushes and weeds were now violently thrust aside and with a wild whoop from the boys, who could keep quiet no longer, the three darted out over the slippery, because still dewy wet, stepping stones.

Swift as the boys were, however, Mr. Lyford easily outdistanced them. Half a dozen tremendous leaps brought him over the stones to the little island. Would he find Helen there?

CHAPTER X

THE CRAZY COUNTERFEITER

STARTLED by the unexpected noise behind him, the crazy counterfeiter, for such he proved to be, quickly turned, lost his balance and sat right down in the brook. The water bubbled over his shoulders and he lifted a pair of very surprised eyes to the boys, who stood knee-deep in the current in front of him.

“ Well, I guess his gun ain’t much use any more,” laughed Skip. “ And s’pose we get him up on the bank. I don’t believe he’s over and above comfortable where he is now.” They reached down and helped him to his feet. And in a moment, scrambling and floundering over the stones and against the swiftly flowing current, they all reached the ground and stamped about, getting the water from their heavy shoes and wringing dry their overalls. When Jim asked for it, the crazy counterfeiter handed him his revolver and though he did not speak, his deep-set, shifty eyes glanced from one to the other, and he chuckled to himself as though appreciating the way in which he had been caught. The boys stepped up, one on either side of him, and slipping their arm through his, started

toward the farm, thus forcing him, against his will, to accompany them.

"We'd better keep him away from the house," said Jim. "He might raise a rumpus and excite grandpa, and besides, the harness room's the strongest place to keep him in till — till — some one comes."

"Why don't you say, 'till the keeper comes,' and be done with it!" interrupted the man. "You needn't think that just because I'm crazy I haven't got any sense."

"We haven't said you were crazy," replied Skip.

"Well, you've been told I'm crazy and you believe it," came the answer. The boys looked at each other in surprise as the other continued: "And you're going to lock me up and send word to the keeper of the asylum that you've got me. Ain't you?"

"That's just about it," agreed Skip, grimly smiling. "But how d'you know so much about what we're going to do, anyway?"

"Me? Oh, I listened last night when you were talking about me. You never knew that I was at the end of the porch, did you? And then," he continued, "you'll all stand round and jaw, jaw, jaw, and come in and look at me like you would at a specimen in a museum. Oh, I know you, you Yankees! Now, here we are! Come on, lock me up. It's safer — for I'm crazy — I am. But I'm a lot saner than you are, any of you. I wouldn't have upset a poor, forlorn old man in an icy brook

in order to get the best of him. No, sir! *I* would have —”

But by this time the “poor old man,” as he called himself, though the boys thought he looked quite hale and hearty, had been gently pushed within the harness room. Jim, who went with him, made him as comfortable as he could. He opened the little, cobwebby window and spread some blankets over the carriage cushions for a couch. Skip, who had run on to the house to tell the news, returned with a plate of doughnuts and a pitcher of milk.

“There now,” said Jim, kindly, “that’s the best we can do for you. Ring this cow bell out of the window if you want anything else. Want to change your clothes? Are they wet?”

“Wet? Why should they be wet?” sneered the captive. “It was a nice, dry brook. Now just you get out of this and let me alone.” His peaceful attitude suddenly changed and the boys just escaped being hit by the plate which had held the doughnuts as they quickly dodged and fastened the door between them and the now infuriated man who began to hurl first one and then another article against the walls and door in quick succession.

“My! How he does go on,” cried Skip. “Just listen to him.”

“Guess he’s crazy ’nough, all right,” laughed Jim. “And now that we’ve got him, what’ll we do with him?”

Sam hurried up just then in time to hear this

remark, so he answered it. "What'll we do with him?" he cried; "we'll hold onto him, till th' 'sylum folks git here an' take him off'n our hands. Skip, s'posen you trot 'round somers, an' see if Mr. Lyford found Helen all right. I'd like to know just what did happen to her, but don't like ter leave this door till th' pore critter inside gits through a banging things round. Jim, you'd better stand out by th' window. Of course he carn't git out thet way but yer carn't never tell what a crazy man'll do."

Jim hurried around the corner of the barn and now, hearing a new kind of noise, ventured to steal up and peer through the little window. The prisoner, on his knees in a corner, was trying to pry loose, with his blunt fingers, some of the floor boards. Jim's shadow darkened the small enclosure. The man looked around with a scowl. Then, seeing who it was he stood up and slouched over to the window. All signs of temper had left him. He was once more a crafty, quiet man, seemingly anxious to make friends with Jim because he picked up a doughnut from the dusty floor and offered it to him.

"Here, want one?" he said, and when Jim shook his head he bit into it himself as he continued: "Say, you saw me just now?" Jim nodded. "What d'you suppose I was doing? You'd never guess so I suppose I might's well tell you. I was hunting for the money Job Greenough hid before he ran away."

Jim was so interested he forgot the man was sup-

posed to be crazy. He leaned his arms on the window-sill. "Do you know where Job Greenough is?" he asked.

"Huh!" grunted the man. "S'pose I'd tell you? You'd arrest him an' get the reward — and that's what *I* want myself."

"Well," suggested Jim, "we might go halves." Then suddenly he remembered his compact with Skip and hastened to correct himself. "No, I couldn't do that," he hastily added, "because —"

"Because I'll tell you why," interrupted the man. He brought his face down so close to Jim's that the boy nervously drew back. "I want that reward myself. First, for finding the money, and though they say it's counterfeit, it's all right, for it's gold, real gold, and I want it, every cent of it. It's buried round here, too. Then, I want the reward for finding Job Greenough, too. And if I could find him first, there'd be no use of hunting for the gold, because I'd make him tell me where to look. Ain't that so?"

"Well, you seemed to think there was, a moment ago," answered Jim, pointing to the corner where the man had succeeded in prying one board loose. "And Job Greenough's dead, anyway."

"Dead?" sneered the man. "He's no more dead than I am."

"How d'you know he isn't?" persisted Jim.

"How d'you know he is?" insisted the other.

As Jim could not answer this question he wisely kept silent and waited for the other to speak. He

had to wait till all the doughnuts and the last of the milk had disappeared, however, before the occupant of the harness room seemed disposed to be sociable again. After he had walked nervously up and down over the uneven floor for a few times he once more approached the window and whispered:

"Say, I'm locked up good and tight, ain't I? Can't get out any way 'tall, can I? You wouldn't help me to escape, would you? Thought not. Say, do you really think I'm crazy?"

"Yes, I do," bluntly answered Jim.

"Well, would you think I was crazy if I told you where the money was kept? The money we all used to make here, on this farm? Not so many years ago? I helped make it and I helped hide it."

"No," faltered Jim, "I don't know that I should—then. For you'd have to have some sense to remember as much as that all these years, wouldn't you? But, *you* didn't help make the money," he quickly added, "and you never saw the secret room."

"How d'you know I didn't?"

"Why, Sam said you were only a 'fence.' That you just got rid of the 'worthless coin.'"

"Hm," the man smiled cunningly as he whispered, "that's all your precious Sam knows about it. What d'you think I came here for anyway?"

"Why, I don't know," answered Jim. Then he laughed. "Do you?"

"Well, if I didn't I wouldn't be here. Listen, bend lower so no one'll hear. Job Greenough is

alive and waiting till I die or am safe and sound in the asylum again. Then he's coming here to dig up the money and get the reward for telling where the secret room is."

"But, if he's alive, why hasn't he done it before?" asked Jim, half believing, in spite of himself, that the story was true.

"Because he doesn't want to divide with me. He'd have been back long before this if he hadn't waited till he could get me out of the way. You know he was the one that put me in the asylum. He doesn't know I'm out. So just you wait. He'll come soon. You let me out of this, will you? And then, when he gets here, I'll, I'll —"

"Yes, yes, what then?" excitedly asked Jim.

"S'pose I'd tell *you*?" chuckled the man. "But let me out and then you'll see." He smiled at Jim and then sat down on the carriage cushions as though suddenly very tired. He nodded two or three times and finally laid down and pulled the robe over him. "You wait and see what I'll do," he muttered; "Job's alive; as much alive as you are. Don't you suppose I know a thing or two, even if I am crazy?" His eyes closed. He seemed fast asleep. Jim stood quite still and watched him. Suddenly he opened his eyes and glared at the boy in so wild a manner Jim was very glad the window was as small as it was. "Just you wait and see me kill — kill — kill him," he cried. "Do you think I'm going to be kept from getting the best of him after waiting all these years? You just

wait and see what'll happen when Job Greenough gets here. *And he's on his way now!* No bars nor locks can keep me from him. You just wait and see what'll happen when he gets here."

"How'll you know when he comes?" asked Jim.

"Don't you suppose I know a thing or two, even if I am crazy?" repeated the man. "I ain't going to *tell* you, but just you wait and *see*. I'll make you open your eyes!" As soon as he had finished this astonishing remark he turned his back on Jim and in a few moments was fast asleep.

Jim was so mixed up in his mind he didn't know just what to think. So he decided to step around the corner and talk things over with Sam. Perhaps there was more or less truth in the crazy man's story after all.

CHAPTER XI

HELEN'S ADVENTURE

SKIP and Helen reached Sam the same moment Jim did and when he was reassured by the hired man that he "mustn't take any stock in what the counterfeiter said, because he's crazy as a loon," Jim turned his attention to Helen. She had been up at the camp, telling her mother and father about her experiences and now that they were quite sure she was all right and had not suffered from her night of exposure, they had sent her down to the farm to thank Jim for his part in her rescue.

"Tell me about it," he said, flushing with embarrassment at her words of praise and anxious to change the subject. He hated to be thanked for anything so simple, he said, "as climbing a tree. How d'you meet him, anyway? Your father and I watched you 'most of the way out of the glen."

"Well, so you did," answered Helen, "and if I hadn't seen those stepping stones, and some wild roses growing between the rocks on the little island, nothing would have happened. But I did see 'em and wanted to get them for mother. I thought they'd look so pretty in the center of the supper table, our first night in the country. So I crossed

over and, Jim, isn't it the cutest little place? Gertrude and I'll have lots of fun there. Well, when I'd picked all the wild roses and wild carrot I could carry and turned round to go back, there he was, crossing over the stones after me!"

"I wanter know," exclaimed Sam. "Face to face with a crazy man, out there, all alone in the woods. You pore little girl!"

"Well, Sam," laughed Helen, "I'm not so very little and I'm almost as old as Jim, and of course then, I didn't know he was crazy."

"What'd you do when you saw him?" asked Skip.

"I kept right on just as though no one was there, to cross back to the trail again," replied Helen. "And I said 'good afternoon' to him 'cause I thought he was a farmer and I wanted to be polite. Then I began to be frightened because he grabbed father's overcoat from my arm and said, 'I want it.' He only had a flannel undershirt on, but I hadn't noticed it till he took father's coat. He buttoned it up quick as though afraid I'd take it away from him and he was standing right in front of the stones, too, and I thought he'd never finish with that coat and step aside and then I found that he wasn't going to move! He meant to keep me there! Oh, then I was so frightened I couldn't speak. He saw he'd scared me for he smiled and said, 'I won't hurt you, little girl, don't you be afraid. Only I've got to keep you here till I find Job Greenough.'"

"Laws!" interrupted Sam.

"Of course I didn't know who Job Greenough was and when I told him so and that I had only just come from the city, he said that didn't make any difference, he'd have to keep me there anyway till he'd got the best of Job. 'Cause I'd tell on him if he'd let me go and then Job would know where he was. Who is Job, anyway? I asked father and he said you'd tell me all about it, Jim, that's partly why I came down, just now."

"You finish your story first and then I'll tell you our part of it," suggested Jim. So Helen continued:

"Well, I trembled so I couldn't talk. I sat right down there at his feet and just looked up at him. And he looked down at me and never spoke for the longest time. I guess he was thinking what to do with me for he peered all round, much as he could without giving me a chance to run away. At last I knew he'd decided upon something for he began to laugh — a funny little laugh and when I heard that I felt better for I just knew a man who could laugh like that wouldn't hurt a little girl. 'Come, get up,' he said, reaching out his hand to help me, and he made me scramble down to the grassy place in the center of the island where he had a bonfire burning, and a horse blanket."

"Judge's," laughed Sam.

"And some milk and eggs and berries," added Helen. "'Here's your supper,' he said, 'and when you're sleepy, wrap yourself up in that blanket.' 'Oh, won't you let me go home?' I cried. 'Yes,

when you tell me where Job Greenough is,' he replied. 'But I don't know where he is,' I answered and I just yelled at him, I was so frightened; 'I only came to-day.' 'Then I'll have to find him myself,' he said, without paying any attention to me and he began to build the fire up and to talk to himself in such a low, funny way that I just couldn't stand it. I started to run but of course he caught me and then he took an old piece of rope and tied it around my two ankles—'hobbling a colt,'—he called it."

The boys and Sam burst out laughing. "And then," continued Helen, "though I could only take little, short steps I *could* get from one rock to another. He made me try. 'Now then,' he said, 'you stay here and I'll go and find Job. Then I'll come back and untie you. But if you yell or make a noise I'll shoot you.' And he pointed a big pistol right at me."

"Wait a minute till I see what he's up to now," whispered Jim, and he jumped up from the ground and ran around to look in at the little window. "All right, he's still fast asleep," he said, returning. "Now, tell the rest."

"Well, that's about all," replied Helen. "I kept perfectly quiet and he didn't come back. I just stayed there, scared and trembling and crying, too, I guess, most of the night, for I saw the moon and lots of stars. Then I fell asleep and didn't know anything more till father came scrambling down over the rocks and woke me up. I never once

thought the man was crazy till father told me. Now you tell me about him, Jim."

Jim, Sam and Skip all told the story together and while they were still going over the mystery of the secret room and the probability of ever finding Job Greenough, the noon whistle blew and a minute later Ellen rang the dinner bell. Jim spent the afternoon working on the farm with Sam and directly after supper went to bed. He thought he had never been so tired before. Not till the next morning was half over did he, quite rested and hungry again, wake up to the duties and pleasures of another warm day. He scrambled into his clothes without much ceremony and hurried downstairs. Ellen was stirring something on the stove and it smelled so good Jim gave a little sigh as he said, "Is that for grandpa? I wish I could have some, too."

Ellen laughed. "Good morning," she said. "You can have all you want, though I doubt if you'll like a milk diet. But there's quite enough for two, so if you'll get a bowl I'll pour you out some to go with your breakfast which is covered up on the pantry shelf."

Presently, Jim, happy in the knowledge that his grandfather was steadily improving though he could not yet see him, ran out to work with Sam who was spending a tiresome though profitable morning in the kitchen garden. When they raked up all the leaves for Cuba to feed on later the garden looked almost as prosperous and well cared for as usual.

"'Nother mornin' at 'em an' I bet we'll get rid of th' pesky things," mused Sam. He slowly straightened up and looked with satisfaction at the result of his tiresome labor. "It suttinly gits th' best of me, th' way them weeds grow."

"Me, too," sighed Jim, sympathetically. "But I don't mind weeding half so much as haying. I'm awfully glad we haven't got half so much of that to do this summer as we generally have, Sam."

"So'm I," answered the other, "but you needn't worry, Jim, fearin' there won't be 'nough work ter do ter keep both on us busy. It's true th' college fellers hes taken th' heft of th' farm work off'n our shoulders but we've plenty to do, jest th' same. You'll hev ter take your grandpop's place at th' work, I guess."

Jim nodded. "I expect to do that," he said.

"Wal, this afternoon I want you should —"

"Oh, Sam! Skip's coming up again this afternoon. Can't I have half a day off?"

"What, again?"

"Yes, just this once. We've something special on hand. We were going to do it yesterday but of course we couldn't on account of the crazy counterfeiter."

"It 'pears ter me you allers do manage to hev something special on hand," laughed Sam. "But I guess 'twill keep fer a day er two, so far's Skip's concerned, anyway. For this morning Mr. Lyford sont him to th' village ter drive while his wife did some shopping for their tent-housekeeping. Ket-

tles and pans and things. He'll be up furst thing after dinner. As they drove by he hollared fur you to wait for him."

"All right, then, I s'pose I'll have to."

"What wuz you a callatin to do, find the secret room? Or hev yer already done so?"

Jim's laughing denial was no sooner made than the call to the midday meal came and after that was over, Skip arrived and with him his father. They brought the keepers who had come for the runaway, still safely locked up in the harness room.

The reward for his capture was so small in comparison to the number of those who had helped find him that all decided to spend the money on a new outfit for the poor man — overcoat, shoes, clothes. Of course he had quite ruined those in which he had run away and Jim and Skip could not bear the thought of seeing the man who had tried so hard to gain his freedom put on the striped charity uniform again. They stood together and watched the prisoner leave the barn and greet the keepers. He willingly allowed them to handcuff him and to help him into the surrey in which he was to drive to the station. The boys felt sorry to see him go. They wished he had stayed longer for despite the opinion of the others they more than half believed his story about the coming of Job Greenough. As though reading their thoughts the man leaned over the wheel and spoke to them.

"Mind what I say, you boys," he whispered, "Job's around here, somewhere. Get busy and find

the money and the secret room first or he will. And then you'll never see a cent of the reward!" The boys laughed, waved their hands at him and then he drove away.

"Seems a mean shame to have him go back to the asylum, doesn't it?" said Jim. "When he's so sensible some of the time. Well, come on, let's see if we can get upstairs now. If we ever do expect to find that secret room we'd better be about it or if what he says is true, Job Greenough'll get ahead of us."

CHAPTER XII

JIM AND HIS GRANDFATHER

THE boys scampered into the house intent on their quest but they were to be disappointed at once. When they met the nurse in the hall and said, in answer to her questions, that they were only going upstairs on the third floor in order to "look 'round," she would not let them go. "The entire house must be kept absolutely quiet," she said, "for my patient's sake. What do you want from upstairs? Can I get anything for you?" The boys thanked her and said "no" and had to content themselves with gazing at the closed shutters of that mysterious corner on the third floor and hoping for rain that they might go upstairs and shut all the windows. They were sure they could discover something if only they could get up there again. *Why* didn't it rain? *Why*, indeed!

The oldest inhabitant could not remember so hot and dry a summer. Day after day passed with never a cloud in the sky and no wind to rustle the drooping branches of the trees or cool the workers in the fields. The brook in the glen grew lower and lower. It soon became quite easy to reach the little island without using the stepping stones and yet

keep one's shoes dry. Sara, Skip's sister, taught Helen and Gertrude Lyford what fun it was to wiggle their bare toes in the soft earth and paddle about in the rippling shallows and when the boys could get an hour from their work the five children would have fine times sailing boats in many a shoal basin of the upper brook or playing "cops and robbers," on the little island that Helen had named "Wild Rose Rock." Every morning, too, most of the campers would come down to the pool at the bridge to take a plunge in its clear depths and the children were always of the number. Thus, with an almost equal division of work and play, time passed.

At the end of the week the nurse left. Ellen was once more in charge of the sick room and Mr. Burton was improving every day. Yet he was not able to stand and Dr. Brown would not let Jim speak of the locket and chain. When asked for permission he would say, "Wait another day."

At last, when the boy was on the verge of open rebellion the reason for the doctor's delay was made known. One afternoon he came as usual for his daily visit but, instead of hitching his horse to the post in front of the house as was his custom, he drove around to the barn.

"Hullo," he said to Ellen, who looked out of the kitchen window, "how's your patient?"

"Sound asleep, so I took this chance to make his broth."

He drank some from the cup she offered and said ;

"Good; don't wake him up, for I'll stay to supper so can see him later. Where's Jim?"

"Splitting kindlings in the shed. Shall I call him?"

"No, I'll find him," and the doctor let Sam, who was mending the harness near by, take his horse. Then, guided by the whack, whack of the quickly descending ax, he quietly made his way to the wood pile and stood watching Jim for several minutes before he was discovered.

At last the boy looked up and saw him. They exchanged greetings, and then Jim, coming forward, said, "Doctor Brown, you're going to let me tell my grandfather to-day!"

"That's so," the doctor answered, with a smile, "I came to let you know."

"Can I go in now?"

"No, Mr. Burton's asleep and I'm going to stay to supper so there's plenty of time. Want to go fishing in the glen? You can tell him after we get back."

"All right, but the brook's so low I don't believe we'll catch anything 'less we go beyond the bridge."

"We'll try, anyway. The meadows are too hot to-day."

"Then I'll get the fishing tackle," answered Jim; "it's in the barn, and tell Sam. We can dig the bait up there."

Though the dim, green shadows of the glen did prove far more pleasing than the sunny stretches of

the meadow, Jim was right about the fish. They had evidently retired to rocky and unknown hollows in the bed of the brook, whose shallow waters scarcely more than covered its winding bed. Dr. Brown did not mind his non-success. Indeed, after a few, quiet moments he reeled in his line and dropping his pole on the ground beside him, leaned back against the trunk of a tree and watched Jim. He, as unsuccessful as his companion, at last followed his example and also gave up trying to catch the wary trout.

"Better luck next time," then said the doctor. "I scarcely thought we'd catch anything to-day. Indeed, I proposed coming up here simply as an excuse to get you away somewhere so I could talk to you about your grandfather. The others will have to know, too, but I wanted to tell you first."

"Oh, dear! What is it this time! Isn't he going to get well, after all?"

"Yes, my boy; your grandfather is practically well now, but I am afraid — he — will — never walk again."

"Why, Dr. Brown, what d'you mean?"

"He is paralyzed from the waist down, Jim."

A long silence followed. Then Jim looked miserably at the doctor. "Poor grandpa," he said. "Does he know it? Have you told him?"

"No. For several days I've been on the verge of telling him but couldn't bring myself to the point. I'm afraid I've been cowardly about it, Jim. But to-day I decided not to wait any longer and as I

drove along on my way here racked my brain trying to think of some easy way to tell him."

"And did you?"

"No. I see no way of softening the truth. The fewer words I use the better. But, when I tell him, I want you to be on hand to show him the locket and chain. Then —"

"You think that'll keep him from worrying too much?"

"That's my idea exactly," answered the doctor.

"And you're sure he'll never walk again, Dr. Brown?"

"I'm afraid so, Jim. Everything indicates it."

"All right, then. Come on. Let's get it over with as soon as possible."

The two slung their fishing rods over their shoulders and for some moments walked along without speaking. Then Jim exclaimed:

"Oh, Dr. Brown, I am *so* anxious to know about my father. It seems to me I've never wanted him so much in my life before as I have this summer. Of course I don't want you to think that I don't feel sorry about my grandfather, for I do, but I can't think of anything else, hardly, 'cept my father. I *do* want him to come home so! You have no idea how much I want him. I don't think of anything else, 'cept the secret room!"

"And it is perfectly right for you to feel so," the doctor replied. "You can show your sympathy for your grandfather every day to come in little acts of loving service to him. Well, here we are. You

stay on the porch, Jim. I'll go in first and when I call you follow and be as cheerful as you can. I'm depending on you to help me out." He entered the house on his dreaded errand while Jim sat down on the stone steps and, with the locket and chain in his hand, waited to be called. A few minutes later, Blackie, as though knowing her friend to be there, came up the cellar-way, and proudly pranced around the corner of the house to lay a dead mouse at his feet. Then she immediately disappeared, evidently to hunt again. Jim had scarcely disposed of this one before she came back with another and not till she had brought four little mice and one big one, to the laughing boy who made as many trips to bury them, did she consider her duty done. Then, curled up in his lap as he again sat on the steps she purred herself to sleep.

"There's one good thing about you, Blackie," Jim said, while gently stroking her soft fur. "You are not a cannibal cat. You kill 'em but you don't eat 'em." Just then his attention was caught by voices from within and he straightened up, thinking he heard his name. But it was a false alarm. He was not yet wanted. So he took a magazine from a chair where Sam had recently been sitting and thought he'd try to read. The pages fell open at the advertising section in the back and he gazed idly from one pictured household utensil and farming implement to another. Suddenly, however, he stopped and looked for a long time at the sketch of a man in a wheel chair. After reading the text over

several times he tore the page out, folded it up carefully and put it in his pocket. Then, dropping Blackie and the magazine, he became so absorbed in his busy thoughts that, after all, he did not hear Dr. Brown call him and not till he came from the house and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder did Jim know he was wanted.

"Dreaming?" asked the doctor.

"Guess I must have been," quickly answered Jim. He jumped to his feet, all excitement. "Can I go in now? How'd he take it?"

"My boy, he knew. I didn't have to tell him."

"Poor grandpa!" Jim's lips trembled. He quite forgot their frequent and unfriendly disputes. "Isn't it awful, Dr. Brown? I just hate to see him. I won't know what to say."

"You needn't worry about that," came the answer. "He saw at once I was troubled about something and made it easy for me by telling me he knew all about it. I was the one to be comforted, not him."

"Who told him?"

"No one. He guessed it. Said he knew it as soon as he was able to think at all and has been making up his mind to be sensible about it ever since. What do you think of that?"

"That's just like him," proudly answered Jim. "You can't get the best of my grandfather. I might have known he wouldn't make a fuss or anything."

"That's so," agreed the doctor, "and I might

have known how he'd take it, too. And as he has little, if any, further need of my services, I shall come to see him from this time on, more as a friend than a doctor. You can tell him about the locket and chain any time you want to, now, Jim."

"All right, I'll tell him pretty soon, then. Tonight after supper, I guess. I want to speak to you about something else now. Do you have to go in there again, right away?"

"No, Ellen's just taken his supper to him and presently she's going to call us to ours. So we have a few minutes. What is it?"

"This, Dr. Brown." Jim thrust the locket and chain back in his pocket and taking the magazine page from it, opened it and handed it to the doctor. "Don't you think that kind of a chair would be nice for my grandfather? You see it says that the one in it can move from place to place by just running his hands over the wheels. And there's a spring to let the back down and make it into kind of a bed. Do you think it's all right?"

"Yes, Jim, I know that chair. I've seen it in Burlington. It seems to be all its makers claim for it."

"Well, then, I want to get it for him. Will you manage it for me? I've got ten dollars and sixty cents of my own money saved up, you know, and will you lend me the rest?"

Dr. Brown looked absent-mindedly at the advertisement and did not answer so Jim continued, "You see, the chair, with all its fixings, foot stool

and everything, comes to fifteen dollars. I thought you'd — maybe, lend me the rest of the money and let me pay you back as I earn it. Mr. Lyford gives me ten cents every time I take the milk up to the camp and fifteen cents an hour when I work for him. And grandpa says all that money's my own." He looked expectantly up into the doctor's face.

"But, Jim," came the answer, "I thought this money was to help you find your father?"

The boy flushed and hesitated. Then he said, "Well, it is — was, I mean. I know my grandfather'd be nice and comfortable in that chair, though, and I guess my father'd want me to get it for him if he knew all the particul'rs. Besides, I mean to get the thousand-dollar reward, you know, in spite of what the crazy counterfeiter said about Job Greenough's snooping 'round for it, himself. For it seems to me *he* can't claim it without getting caught, can he?"

"Reward? What reward?"

"For the secret room, Dr. Brown, oh, I bet you know, all right."

The doctor laughed. "I wouldn't count too much on that," he said. "There's Ellen calling us in to supper. Let's go. Yes, my boy, I'll lend you the money and send for the chair. It ought to come within a week. Your grandfather will be so delighted with it I'm sure you'll feel more than repaid. But think first about your father, Jim. You may not find the secret room nor discover Job Green-

ough's hiding place. You may never get a cent of that reward. What then?"

"I should be awfully sorry, of course, Dr. Brown, but I guess grandpa needs that chair just now more than I need my father. And please don't say anything about it to him. I want to surprise him."

An hour later the boy stood by the roadside and watched the doctor drive off, the precious money and advertisement safely tucked away in his pocket. Then he went in to see his grandfather.

"Oh, grandpa, I'm so sorry," he said.

"I know you are, my boy, but be thankful I'm all right in my t'other end. There's a bright side to everything, you know; look on that."

"Grandpa, you make me think of what Sam said about you," and Jim smiled through the tears that persisted in filling his eyes.

"What's that?"

"You 'certingly are the beatingest,' and I think so, too."

"Glad you do, Jim."

"And I only wish I could do something to help you."

"You can. Don't feel bad about me any more. There's no use crying over spilt milk. By the way, you taking milk up to the camp every day? That's good. You'll have quite a little money saved up, by and by, won't you? Well, you know, Jim, even the best doctors in the land are sometimes mistaken and I'm going to prove that Dr. Brown is! Though

I d'know but what that'd be a pretty mean way to treat him after all he's done for me, patching me up almost as good as new, wouldn't it? It certainly would be hard on him to make him acknowledge he was in the wrong as to my legs."

"What do you mean to do, grandpa?"

"I mean to WALK, that's what!" The old man's eyes twinkled with excitement. "I mean to show the people of this county that my usefulness ain't all gone yet!"

"I bet you do it, too," said Jim, looking at his grandfather with admiration. The man laughed at the boy's implicit faith.

"Well, well, we won't talk any more about it now," he said. "Let's change the subject. What a time you had with the crazy counterfeiter, didn't you? I heard all about him from the doctor. But I was very glad I didn't see him, though I remember him well. And Mr. Jones tells me you know about the secret room."

"Yes, sir, Sam told Skip and me. We opened up the house, too. Do you mind, grandpa?"

"No, don't know that I do. Seems to me you are sensible enough now to know that old story. I haven't told you before because I didn't want to fill your mind with a lot of nonsense about the matter. 'Pears to me, though, I needn't have worried, for *my* fall seems to have knocked a good deal of sense into your head! The men folks tell me you're likely to turn out all right, Jim; but don't you get puffed up yet awhile, for it's astonishing where all

the bright boys go. 'Tany rate, the men they turn into don't seem to be over and above ordinary."

Jim laughed. "You said you wanted me to help you, grandpa."

"Yes, I do. I guess it is about time now that you had a let up from work and had some fun of your own. I want you to find the secret room. That is, if you can."

"Oh, grandpa, how'd you know I have been just crazy to do that ever since Skip and I knew about it?"

"Which, hunt for it or find it?"

"Why, both, of course," laughingly answered Jim.

"Well," answered his grandfather, "I was a boy, myself, once."

"Then you know just how Skip and I feel about hunting for it," Jim replied. "But I don't see why, grandpa, if *you* hunted for it, you didn't find it? I think I know where it is, already."

"You do?"

"Yes. Skip and I looked for it, of course, but didn't have much time to hunt for it that first day and we haven't been allowed to go upstairs since because the nurse and Dr. Brown were afraid we'd disturb you if we made a noise. But I'm just sure I know where that secret room is."

"Certain sure, are you?" laughed his grandfather. "Well, you can begin to hunt in earnest to-morrow and you needn't be afraid of worrying me if you do make a noise. I am quite strong and

well again so far as my head is concerned and hope I can stand a good, healthy noise all right. So long as you don't actually tear the house down I don't care what you do."

"Skip may join in, too?"

"Of course, it wouldn't be much fun without your side partner, would it?"

"Say, grandpa," persisted Jim. "Why didn't you find the secret room?"

"Because, my boy, I wasn't sure there was one. You know the detectives said they found enough tools, machinery and things under the wood pile in the shed to account for any amount of counterfeiting done, so, as I had so much else to worry me then I didn't hunt around for a reward for what I wasn't sure existed. I was a man then, too, you know, and didn't believe things so easily as boys do. But since I've been lying here, flat on my back, with more than time enough to think things over, I've come to the conclusion that there may be something in that secret room idea, after all. As I look back over the past certain memories seem to point that way. So you and Skip go ahead. Don't tell me all the details, they'd bother me. But report to me when you've done or found anything. I've told Sam to let you quit work for a day or two."

"Oh, good for you, grandpa, thank you ever so much," delightedly cried Jim. Then Mr. Burton, making an effort at self-control, said:

"I s'pose Sam told you about my trouble at the time your father was born?"

"Yes, sir, he did," and Jim's hand shyly crept over the counterpane and rested for a moment on his grandfather's. "It must have been awful. Sam said that was why you wouldn't live in the house any longer but built the extension."

"Yes, that's so."

"I'm sorry about that, grandpa, but I do wish we lived here. These rooms are so nice and comfortable and cool. It's awfully hot weather now and you have no idea how scorching the extension is. I hate to go to bed nights, and when I do go I can't get to sleep for hours and hours."

"You would like to live here?"

"Oh, wouldn't I!"

"Well, we ain't a-going to. And just as soon as I can manage it, I'll close up here and move back into my old room. I can't bear this terrible house. And the thought of all those empty, silent rooms upstairs in rows, gives me the creeps. They are full of unhappy memories, Jim. I'm sorry about the hot weather, but it can't last much longer."

Jim did not reply. He knew, when his grandfather spoke in so decided a way it was useless to plead with him. So he wisely kept silent, hiding his disappointment as best he could and wondering how to introduce the subject which had lain for so long a time close to his heart. The next words from the invalid solved the difficulty and made his answer so easy he spoke before he realized what he was saying.

"Well, I don't suppose Sam, or the doctor, or

Mr. Jones told you anything about your father, did they, Jim?"

"Yes, sir, Sam did, but not till he had seen this," and at last the little, old-fashioned locket, on its thin chain, was dropped from a small, dirty, hot hand, into the thin, white one held to receive it. "It popped right out of the tree when you fell, and I found it on the ground next to your hat. Wasn't it too wonderful for anything, grandpa?" and Jim trembled with excitement. Then he scarcely breathed as he waited for some word from the quiet man in the big, old bed. One shaking, eager hand went up to cover trembling lips, the other clutched the locket close to his tired heart. He closed his eyes and leaned back against the pillows with a deep, deep sigh. To Jim the silence was terrible. He wanted to get off the bed and steal away, yet was afraid to move. Long minutes passed. Then Ellen, who had appeared in the doorway a short time before, motioned to him. How he reached her he never knew but in a minute they were both on the porch and he was chokingly asking her if he had killed his grandfather.

"No, no," she smilingly answered, "don't you worry the least bit in the world, Jim. You didn't do anything wrong. Indeed, I don't see how you could have done anything different. He'll feel better in a few minutes. I'll sit out here by the door where I can hear him when he calls, but there's no need for us both to stay, so why don't you go down

and see Skip for a while? It won't be bedtime for an hour yet."

"If you're sure —" began Jim, doubtfully.

"Of course I'm sure," came the quick and smiling answer. "Your grandfather's all right, I tell you, Jim. It was natural for the sight of that long-lost locket to make him feel bad for a while but there's nothing to worry about. By and by I guess he'll tell you all about your father and then I s'pose you'll be going away to find him."

"You just bet I will, and I guess grandpa'll be the first one to send me, too. I guess he's almost as anxious as I am to see my father. Goodness! Did you see how he looked when I gave him that locket? Cricky, but I was scared. Don't you think he'll ask for me in a few minutes?"

"Well, if he does, he can't see you. He's had enough excitement to-night to last him for a month of Sundays. What were you talking about at first? Seems to me you were in there a pretty long time."

"The secret room, and oh, Ellen, he says for me to go ahead and find it. That is, if I can. He thinks there may be one, after all. So I guess I *will* go down to Skip's. I've got just heaps to tell him, and if he can come I'll bring him back for the night. Then we can begin to hunt the first thing in the morning. Well, so long. Tell grandpa if he wanted to talk to me, that you wouldn't let him, will you, Ellen? I won't be gone so very long."

CHAPTER XIII

OUTSIDE THE SECRET ROOM

WHEN the old-fashioned banjo clock on the kitchen wall struck five, the room was still gray and dim with early morning light. No sooner had the last metallic note sounded than Jim and Skip softly stole from the pantry where they had just eaten a hasty breakfast of beans and brown bread, washed down with copious draughts of milk. Though they could have waited till the usual time and eaten a good, hot meal with Ellen and Sam, they were so anxious to begin their work that they chose this way of entering upon what was to prove a most exciting day. They wanted to get upstairs as soon as possible without waking Mr. Burton, Sam, who slept on the sofa in the hall, or Ellen, who was in a room just at the top of the first flight of stairs. The boys stood at the kitchen door and silently pondered this question for a moment; then Jim motioned to Skip and hurried outdoors.

"I'll tell you what," he whispered, "let's shinny up the maple and climb in the back window over the roof. The big branch scrapes the ridge pole. I'll go first with the hammer and chisel and you bring the line and the paper and pencil."

"All right, I've got 'em in my pocket. Go ahead."

Jim easily sprang into the crotch of the maple tree and soon was crawling out on the branch that grew in a protecting way over the low, extension roof. In a moment he sat astride the sill on the open window to wait for Skip who, though following as fast as he could, took some time longer to reach the same spot. Then they stealthily made their way to the dust-covered stairs which wound around to the upper floor.

"I almost feel like a burglar," whispered Skip.

"So do I, ain't it fine?" Jim answered.

"Well, I d'know 'bout that," came in a subdued giggle from the other, "I've never been one. I meant the dark and the quiet and everything."

"So do I. That's what makes it so great — this creepy feeling of doing something you've never done before, before daylight. Just think what we're going to find, too."

"Now don't you be too sure of that," laughed the doubting, if more practical, Skip. "But I'm glad for one thing, it's a warm morning. I'm shivery 'nough as 'tis."

"That's nerves. Shivers always go with a secret like this. Now then, come on. Here we are."

"What you going to do first?"

"Well, first thing, I'm going to find out how long the wall of the carpenter's shop is, out here in the hall, and inside, in the room. Then I'm going to measure the distance from the end of the room to

this window in the hall. Then, you see, we'll know just about how much room there is behind this," and he gave the space of faded wall paper at his elbow a good, hard blow. Much to his surprise, it resulted in a ghostly echo. In spite of his expectations he had scarcely looked for so accurate an answer to his assertion.

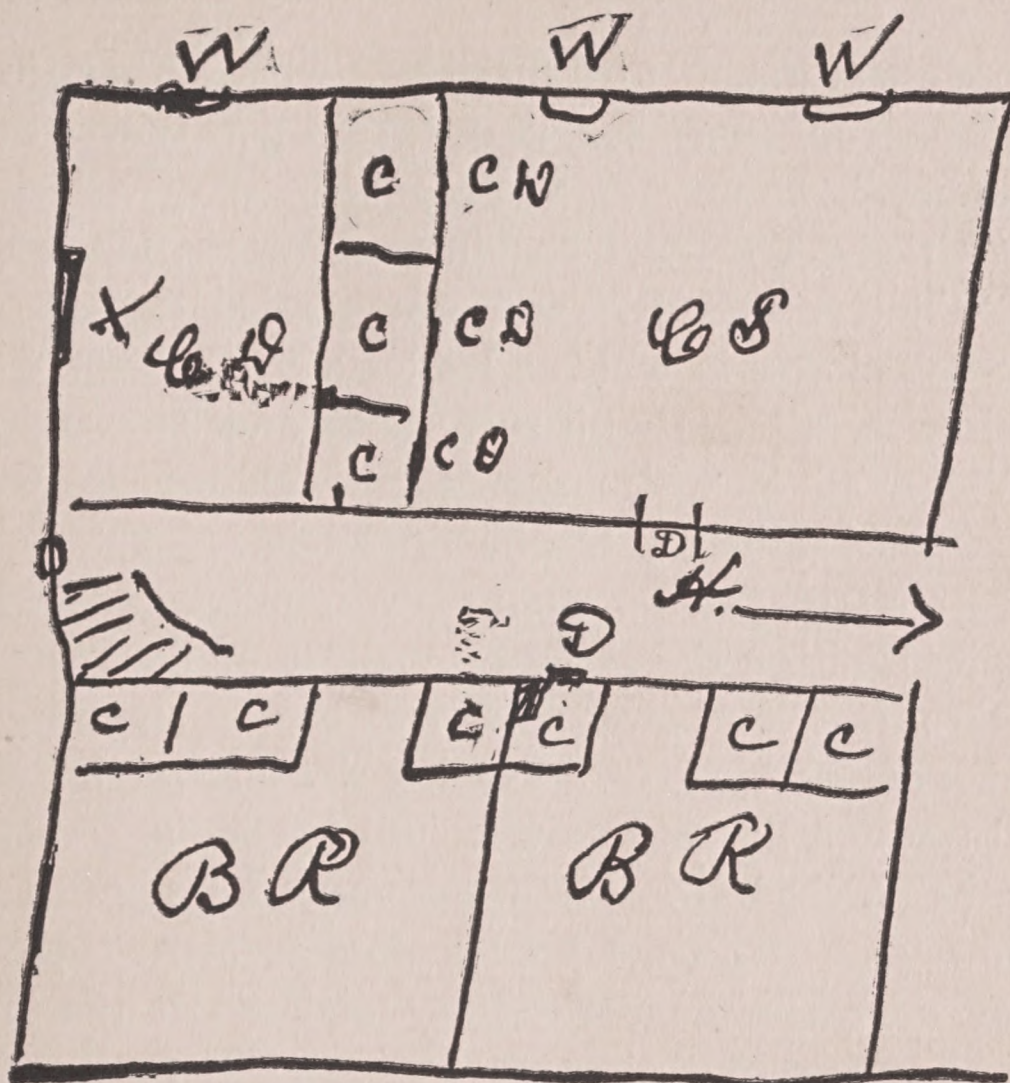
"There, what did I tell you," he excitedly cried. "I'll bet you anything the secret room *is* there, the other side of this wall. Let's get to work right off. Here, you take this end of the fish line — see, I've tied a red string round it every two feet for a measure — and stand by the door. I'll do the pacing."

"Cricky," cried Skip, and he obediently followed directions. Then passed several minutes of measuring and re-measuring closets, room and hall, at the end of which time the boys fairly hugged each other in their excitement.

At a point in the hall, a measured six feet from the window, was the first corner of the room called the carpenter's shop. This corner was in a closet. Therefore, behind that six feet of space which finished the hall from this corner to the window, was, what? Why, the secret room, of course! Jim drew a plan to show his grandfather.

"That's fine," said his chum, looking over the other's shoulder; "that'll show him better than we can tell him, but now the question is, how are we going to get in?"

"Well," answered Jim, "I s'pose we might try



- W = Windows
 C = Closets
 C. d. = Closet Doors
 C. S. = Carpenter Shop.
 C. P. = Counterfeiter's den
 X = Chimney
 A = Circular Staircase
 D = Leading down
 D = door to Carpenter
 Shop and to ladder
 to roof.
 A = Hall leading to
 middle of house
 B. R. = Bed Rooms

the closets first. No, I'll tell you what, let's go up on the roof and see if we can get down the chimney."

"Cricky, I know I couldn't. I'm too fat."

"I'll try, anyway," and Jim hurried to one of the hall closets in which a ladder led to a trapdoor. This was fastened with rusty bolts and bars and a padlock, all of which soon gave way beneath the noisy onslaughts of the hammer wielded by Jim's vigorous right arm. In a few minutes the boys climbed out on the steely gray slates of the almost flat roof. The hot, round disk of the sun shone down on them out of a burning sky and the hoary, old trees on the mountain stood lifeless and somber in the parched air. Nature seemed full of menace and had the boys not been so intent on their quest they might have noticed and wondered at the unusual aspect of their surroundings. But never a thought did they give to Nature or her moods that morning. Running lightly over the already warm roof in their bare feet, they reached the chimney at the end of the house. Here, Skip leaned over, allowing Jim to get on his shoulders and climb to the top of the chimney. He shaded his eyes and peered down into the flue. Then he slipped back to the roof again.

"No use," he said. "The chimney looks big enough from the outside, but it's divided into three flues; one for each floor. I'm afraid I'm too big to get down. I know I'm thin enough for almost

anything, but the flue to the secret room is the smallest of the three, and it wouldn't be much fun to get caught half way down and not be able to move either way — and not know what I might fall into if I did manage to slip down."

"No, of course that wouldn't be fun," agreed Skip. "But there's a fireplace down there, so that's another proof."

"Yep," said Jim, thoughtfully, dropping to his knees and looking over the front edge of the roof. "The room's there, all right. But 'twon't do us much good if we can't find the way in, will it?"

He leaned forward as far as he dared, and Skip with one arm around a corner of the chimney, held on to the other's overalls, while Jim considered the possibility of letting himself down on a rope and trying to open the blinds from the outside. When he wriggled back to his chum that boy felt greatly relieved. It wasn't much fun to act the part of life saver to so daring an investigator.

"Nothing doing there, either," said Jim. "The cornice goes out so far from the wall that I couldn't swing close enough to the window to open it. Besides, the blinds are fastened on the inside. And I could never pry 'em open while swinging on a rope. And we mustn't use a ladder from the ground 'cause we don't want any one else to know. No, siree, we've got to find a way from inside the house."

"Well, come on, then," said Skip. "Let's go

to work right away again." He would not feel quite safe from accidents till Jim was once more down the ladder.

When they were back in the carpenter's shop, the first thing they did was to examine the closets. Two of these they had already opened. It did not take them long to make a careful examination of walls, ceiling, floor and shelves. Indeed, so thoroughly did they overhaul the dusty and cobwebby contents of these dark corners that when they finally stopped to rest before opening the third, and still locked door, they had to laugh at the disheveled appearance of each other.

"My, but you're dusty," said Jim, "and you just ought to see your face."

"I don't hanker to, much, if it's half so dirty as yours," laughed Skip, happily. "Cricky, but I'm having a good time all right, ain't you, Jim? And I feel so excited now for I bet a doughnut the door to that room'll be through the closet. Don't you think so, too?"

"Yep, I do, for it certainly isn't anywhere else. Here're the keys we didn't try the other day. This one seems to fit, but it sticks so I can't turn it. Here, I'll tell you what, Skip. You go down to the shed and bring up some oil in a cup and the big feather that's there. A few drops of kerosene'll fix the lock all right, and while you are gone I'll fasten the trapdoor to the roof. I forgot it just now and a wind might rattle it or blow it off its hinges."

"All right." Skip started, then turned to nod

his head when Jim added, "And bring back a snack of something to eat from the pantry."

In a few minutes the two were swinging their feet as they sat together on the long carpenter's bench, alternately biting into a cookie and a big, red apple, left over from the year before.

"Feel better?" questioned Skip. "I do, and what do you think? Pa's down there with your grandfather and Ellen's packing a bag in the kitchen. It's Sam's, I think. Anyway, he's shaving and his boots are all blacked."

Jim looked at him in amazement. "Shaving," he repeated. "Why, to-day ain't Sunday."

"I know it, but something's doing down there, all right. Perhaps Sam's going away."

"I wonder if they want me." Jim hastily swallowed the last of his apple and jumped off the bench.

"Oh, Jim, don't go down now," cried his chum. "If they want you, they'll yell and they never said a word to me about needing you. Don't go till we've gotten in the closet anyway."

While Skip was thus speaking he dipped the big turkey feather in the cup of oil and whisked it around in the lock on the door. Then he put the old key as far down in the cup as it would go and when it was well covered with oil, hastily inserted it in the lock. This time, when they tried it, the key turned and the opening, creaking door soon allowed them to enter what they found to be a deep clothespress. On the shelves were laid away, in neat folds, old and faded women's garments, many

of them of rich brocade, trimmed with yellow lace or elaborate silken fringe. Homespun linen sheets covered them. From the wall and ceiling hung men's broadcloth suits, army uniforms, beaver hats and many ancient and curious articles of dress or ornament. Canes, muskets, and an old blunderbus were stacked in one corner. A cedar chest, beneath the lowest shelf, seemed to the boys, when they lifted the cover, to be filled with gold buckles, chains, rings and miniatures.

"Wouldn't the girls just love to dress up in these things?" said Skip, as he reluctantly let the cover fall. A faint odor from the dried wood came to their noses when the metal-bound corners jarred into place.

"Yes," Jim replied, now quite forgetting his desire to go downstairs. "We'll ask grandpa if they can and then we'll all rig up and show the campers. I'd like to see how I look in this uniform. See, here's the cocked hat that goes with it, too, and the heavy boots and —"

"I guess I'll choose this," laughed Skip, and he dragged from a shelf a tremendous hoop skirt and with it a poke bonnet. This had a string attached to the front edge by which it could be pulled well over the face. "Here, help me into these, will you? Then I'll put on a —"

"Not now," interrupted Jim, sneezing in the dust-filled atmosphere. "Put 'em back till I ask grandpa. He might not like it, if we didn't. Here, boost me up, I want to knock on the wall back

of the top shelf. That's the only square foot we haven't punched, though I don't believe there'd be an entrance way up there, and there isn't," he added after a minute, when he finally left the closet and stood in undecided attitude in the center of the room. "Skip, *wherever* do you s'pose the door to the secret room *is*?"

"Don't know," came the happy answer. "Don't care much, either. There's enough fun right here in this room to keep *me* busy for weeks."

"But think of the one thousand dollars reward."

"Well, 'less you cut a hole through the wall I don't see how you're ever going to get in there."

"I don't either," dejectedly answered Jim, "and yet I hate to give up and do that. There *is* a regular way in and I don't want to be beaten at finding it. How'd the old counterfeitters get in, anyway?"

Both boys laughed and before Skip could answer, Ellen's voice came up to them from the foot of the winding stair.

"Skip! Jim! Boys, come down," she called. "Your turn to take the milk up to camp, Skip; you're pretty late, too, and your grandfather wants you, Jim."

"All right," they answered, hastily finishing the last of the apple and doughnut, and as they started for the first floor Jim added, "I wonder if he's going to tell me about my father now. You know I haven't seen grandpa since I showed him the locket last night."

"Cricky, that's just what it is, I bet you any-

thing," Skip replied. "And I shouldn't wonder but what he's sending Sam off to find him."

"I've thought of that, too, but I just guess he shan't go. If any one does that, I'm the one."

"Oh, Jim, d'you think you can make your grandfather let you? I don't."

"You just wait and see if I can't," said Jim, his eyes shining brighter than ever in his excitement.

"Hurry up to the camp and come back's soon as you can and I'll be out by that time, I guess, and'll have something to tell you."

"All right. But I hope you *can* finish about the secret room before you go away; that is, if you *are* going," Skip added.

He started on his errand; Jim smiled back at him; then, taking a long breath, entered his grandfather's room, prepared, if need be, for what he feared might be an unhappy interview.

CHAPTER XIV

THE QUARREL

“**T**HAT you, Jim?” Mr. Burton, propped up in an old, black-walnut chair, a stick of wood wedged beneath the rockers to keep it steady, peered at the boy from under bristling white eyebrows with so penetrating a glance that the boy’s brave attitude of a moment ago suddenly left him. He gazed at the old man in astonishment. Never before had Jim seen his grandfather look so masterful, and that was saying a good deal for no other man in the township was so accustomed to rule as was Mr. Burton. And with the memory of last night’s pathetic interview still so vivid this contrast was all the greater. The hawk-like nose, the keen eyes, the gaunt, sinewy hands, all showed energy and determination. The white sick look they had then did not seem to mean anything now, and the meek and helpless attitude of the invalid had entirely disappeared.

So Jim hadn’t a word to say and quietly slid into the chair indicated by his grandfather. This was on the other side of the small table which hid from sight the only indication of the accident.

“I want you to sit there,” began Mr. Burton, “so

you won't see my legs. I want you to forget my present helplessness. Only present, mind you, for I'm going to walk; just you wait and see if I don't. I would now, only it ain't — ain't just convenient to-day." He added these words in grim jest while impatiently drawing the faded quilt still closer around him. "And I want you to sit there for another reason, Jim. Look at these." He lifted a big handkerchief from the center of the table and disclosed to view several papers, legal-looking documents, some tied with red tape and almost all of them looking quite old and faded, as though they had been for some time in the dark. "Look 'em over, Jim, and tell me if you understand 'em. Do you?"

"Yes, sir, I think I do," answered the boy. "This is a will, isn't it?" He pointed to the newest looking paper which lay folded on top of the others.

"Right you are," said his grandfather. "I've just made it. The doctor, who has just gone, witnessed it, and Ellen, too. You see you and Skip are not the only ones who have been busy in the house this morning, hot as 'tis. D'you ever know such heat? And not a promise of change, either. Well, and what's this paper?" Slipping the one they had just spoken of to one side the old man took up a second pamphlet and whisked it back and forth in his fingers. "You couldn't guess in a month of Sundays, Jim, so I might's well tell you that this

is a deed to this property — the deed that made this farm mine. Then this one is my life insurance paper; t'other one's the family record of our births, marriages, deaths, and so forth. And this one is about you."

"Me, grandpa?"

"Yes, read it."

With a bewildered air and nervous fingers, Jim unfolded the stiff, crinkly paper and tried hard to understand what all the legal phrases and red embossed names meant. In a moment he looked up and said laughingly:

"I'd rather you told me, grandpa; I'm sure I don't understand it at all. What does it mean, anyway? What is it all about?"

"It means that you are the owner of the pine plantation and the ravine, Jim."

"Owner, but why?"

"I have given 'em to you and that paper's the deed to say so."

"But why, grandpa?"

"Because I calculate you kinder deserve some thanks for all the trouble you've taken for me ever since I've been lying here, so helpless and so cranky."

"Oh, grandpa, don't say that," Jim interrupted, blushing very deeply; "I haven't done one bit more'n I ought to have done."

"But you did it and I want to show I'm grateful. And so long as I haven't any money to buy you a

present, I thought you might like to own the pines and the ravine as well as any other part of the farm."

"Like the pines! Why, grandpa, you know I just love 'em, and as for the glen —"

"Well, they're yours now."

"But why not put it in your will, so long as you have made it? All the farm is my home, isn't it? What are you dividing it up for now, grandpa?"

"All the farm was your home until this morning, Jim. But since then it has shrunk considerable." And Mr. Burton swallowed as though something hurt his throat. "I've sold to those high falutin' college fellers who think they know it all, pretty much everything we are accustomed to call 'home.' They can now carry out all their silly farming notions to their hearts' content from one year's end to another. I might have mortgaged the farm, but I don't believe in that kind of a transaction; never did. So the land that they've been renting, they own, and I have got the money; and all the home you've got now is the garden patch, the house, the ravine, and the pines. About twenty acres instead of a hundred and twenty, and of that twenty only about one that'll amount to anything to raise vegetables on. We'll have to buy the fodder for the team and cow from Mr. Jones."

"Gee whizz, what d'you do that for, grandpa?"

"I needed the money — enough money to find my son with, Jim. And Mr. Lyford, as you know, has been pestering me ever since they first came up

here to sell. I don't know as I should have done it if it hadn't been for what you gave me last night. Since then, I can tell you, I have done some pretty tall thinking — thinking about your father."

"Here!" with an affectionate gesture, he gathered up the remaining papers and looked them over as he continued, "these envelopes hold all his letters to me — very few you see they are, Jim, and worth nothing to any one except to me, but to me they mean more than all the rest of the papers put together, for by them only do I expect to trace your father, and my son — my only boy. If I should die, these letters would be the only thing you'd have to tell you about your father, Jim. So do you wonder that I am so particular to see that they are always kept under lock and key? This bundle is what I have always kept locked up in that big drawer in the writing-desk. Sam's only got copies of 'em for I wouldn't even trust the originals to him."

As he spoke, Mr. Burton swept all the papers together and snapped a rubber band around them. "There," he said to Jim, handing the packet to him, "put 'em back in the desk in the kitchen and then I'll tell you what we'll do, you and I, while Sam's away. I s'pose I can't be thankful enough that I fell out of the old oak, if that was the only way I was ever to find the locket and chain, though even so, it seems to me that I'm paying pretty dear for my past mistakes."

"While Sam's away," breathlessly repeated Jim, as he hurried back to his grandfather, and handed

him the desk key which Mr. Burton always wore on his watch chain. "What's Sam going away for? And where's he going, grandpa?"

"He's going around the world, if necessary. Jim, he's going to find your father and bring him back to you — to me — to us."

"But I'm going to do that."

"You?"

"Yes, grandpa, I've always expected to do that."

"You have, eh? Well, you've never told *me* so. This is news I hadn't calculated on." A smile hovered around the corners of Mr. Burton's mouth and wrinkled up his eyes in a way Jim had learned long ago to dread. He was now so excited, however, he forgot to be afraid of his grandfather, and the thought that he would not be allowed to do what he had always wanted and planned to do was almost too hard to bear. Yet he tried to keep his temper till the old man's superior manner taxed his self-control beyond the breaking point. It seemed to Jim that he was being treated unfairly, taken little thought of; and he did not realize that, never having spoken to his grandfather on the subject, the older man naturally would not know how he felt. Now he tried hard to explain but his grandfather either would not, or did not, understand, till, at last, Jim quite forgot all about his grandfather's weak condition and that he was talking to a much older man. So he spoke rapidly, his words almost running into one another in his excitement and his desire to tell just what was in his heart and mind. This was

something he had never done before and his grandfather, too surprised to say a word, looked at him in amazement.

"Yes, sir," Jim continued, "I've always meant to go and find my father and if I haven't told you, whose fault is it? Not mine, but yours, for you've never let me speak to you about him nor how I felt, so how could I? But I've got a right to go. He's my father, not Sam's, and I'm going, too, and you can't stop me."

"How far'll you go, Jim?" coolly asked his grandfather. "To the station? Yes, for you can ride on one of my horses. But after that, how far'll you get without any money?"

"I'll take what you got from selling the land, with which you're going to send Sam."

"You will, will you? Who's going to give it to you?"

"You will, grandpa."

"I?"

"Yes, you, grandpa. You have no right to—"

"Jim, be silent!" now thundered his grandfather. "You don't know beans. If you did you'd have enough sense to realize that you, a fourteen-year-old boy would stand mighty little chance of success, if once you got as far as Albany, which I very much doubt you'd do. You'd lose your money, if not your head, before you got to the railroad station. It'll be nip and tuck with Sam, even, crippled as he is with rheumatism, to find his way around and to keep clear of swindlers and pickpockets; but *he's* got

sense to go in when it rains and you don't seem to be overburdened with that commodity and —"

"Well, if I ain't, whose fault is it, I'd like to know?" shrilly interrupted Jim. "You've brought me up."

"Jim, be silent."

"I won't, either," the boy defiantly replied; "you can't make me now, and I'm just going to tell you what I think of you and then I'll run away as my father did. Perhaps you bossed *him* so much he had to, too. You have had your own way all your life and never let any one dispute you and you've been high-handed with any one who ever said a word you didn't like. I heard the men say so the other night down at the post-office, and now mebbe you're getting just what you deserve. They said that, too. And that you're sotter'n a meeting-house. And I guess they're right. I've always wanted to talk to you about my father and you've never let me and I've always been afraid of you. I've wanted to like you and tell you things and you've never let me come anywhere near you. And you've never let me have any friends here to stay, nor opened the house, nor anything. You've always been thinking about the past and never about making me happy nor letting me be company for you." Here Jim choked a little but catching his breath continued, "So I've grown up to be a lonesome boy, 'cause I couldn't tell other people the things I wanted to tell you; and I got into the habit of thinking about my father and I've planned every

day since I can remember about going to find him. And now if the time has come for some one to go and there's money to go with and you won't let me be the one, I'll never forgive you as long as I live."

At last, out of breath and shaking with fear and rage and bitterness, the boy stopped speaking. He stood, his hands clenched, resting on the table which moved beneath his nervous, twitching fingers, and gazed with fixed eyes into his grandfather's face, upturned in speechless amazement to his.

The man reached out his long, thin arms and grasped the boy by the shoulders, forcing him to come around the corner of the table in front of him. Still without speaking he kept his hold. In a moment Jim was on the floor at his grandfather's feet, his head buried in his arms as they were flung on the old quilt on the man's lap. Suddenly Jim felt tired — more tired than he had ever felt before in his life, and so he just rested there and waited for his grandfather to speak. He felt as though nothing would matter again, as though for him the end of the world had come. And he didn't much care, either. He had spoken his mind and told his grandfather just what he thought. But were all those thoughts his own? They sounded so queer, some way, when spoken. He really did believe that he thought just that way, but after all, what did it matter? What did anything matter? And why didn't his grandfather say something?

Minutes, to Jim they seemed an eternity, passed in silence. Mr. Burton did not speak but his grasp

on Jim's shoulders relaxed, and after the boy had thought very hard for a long time, he wriggled away and stood up, whispering the words that were so very hard to utter.

"I beg your pardon, grandpa, for what I said."

"I think you'd better, Jim," dryly replied the other. "Have you anything more you'd like to say?"

"Yes, sir, I have — I —" and yet he hesitated.

"Well, out with it, then. We might as well clear everything up and start fresh, eh? What is it? I'm prepared for anything now, 'pears to me. I guess nothing else you can say'll surprise me more'n what you've said already."

The old man leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. A curious expression flitted over his strong, white face; an expression Jim had never seen before and did not understand now, but he was still so full of his own troubles he paid little attention to his grandfather; he began hurriedly to speak again as though he scarcely had time enough to tell all he wished.

"I *do* mean it, sir, when I beg your pardon," he said, "for I s'pose I was disrespectful. But I guess I *meant* every word I said."

"Then if you meant 'em, why beg my pardon for 'em?" asked his grandfather with grim humor, opening his heavy eyelids and gazing at the boy for one brief moment.

"Because," Jim continued, "I ought not to have lost my temper. I ought to have said what I did

more politely, I s'pose, so I do beg your pardon for my manner but not for the words."

"That's honest, at all events, Jim. I grant it freely, for I can't abide hypocrisy. And now, go on! What next? This is getting quite interesting." With an amused, cynical laugh, that hurt the boy to hear it, Mr. Burton straightened up in his chair and looked at his grandson.

Jim tried to keep his angry tears back as he answered: "I've almost found the secret room. I think Skip and I may get in there this afternoon and then I'll get the reward, won't I?"

"You certainly will, if you can place any reliance in the word of the United States Government, and I guess you can — and Job Greenough doesn't come to light in the meantime to get it first."

"And you'll let me have the thousand dollars?"

"I will."

"Well, then, I'll take my share, for Skip's in on this thing with me, too — and he'll have to have \$500 — and use my part to find my father with."

"You've made up your mind, Jim?"

"Yes, grandpa."

"To go and leave me alone?"

Jim choked again. "Ellen'll stay with you," he said. "And perhaps Sam'll be back by that time, for it'll take several days to hear from Washington, and maybe the President'll have to know about it."

"Maybe," repeated his grandfather. "Yes, I shouldn't wonder but what he'd have to," he laughed. "But will you now drive Sam to the

station? He's ready and waiting and I guess you'll have to hurry in order to catch the train. I'll be obliged if you'll step in here when you get back and tell me if he got off all right. You know his rheumatism makes him kind of clumsy."

"Course I will, grandpa. And can I go, too, afterward? Can I have that money?"

"Why, you just said you were going to, anyway, didn't you? No, don't answer now, Jim; but come right in here after you get back and we'll finish this highly exciting and interesting conversation and settle the affairs of the universe as well as our own. You may be sure you have given me plenty of food for thought while you are away. Go now, for there's Sam at the front door. He's driven around from the barn, and you must allow plenty of time on account of the heat."

When his grandfather talked in such a cynical, superior manner, there was no use in trying to say another word so Jim turned away in silence. As he stepped into the old-fashioned buggy and took the reins from Sam's willing fingers, the only thing he could think of was that the cherished hopes of his whole life had amounted to nothing. Sam was going to do what he had always longed and hoped to do himself. His heart ached with bitterness and disappointment and hot tears blinded his eyes. How could he stand it? In a few minutes they passed Skip, who, tired of waiting for his friend, was trudging along the dusty road toward home and dinner. Then Jim remembered the secret room and

the reward. They were to continue their search again that afternoon. This thought made him feel a little better and he began to plan just what they would do when next they went upstairs.

CHAPTER XV

THE BIG WIND

ON the station platform a surprise waited for Jim. The invalid's wheeled chair had come. Dr. Brown had been better than his word. His telegram had had good results and there was the comfortable-looking chair, well wrapped in burlap, waiting to be carried home. It was aggravating to Jim that he could not manage it in the buggy, but the camp wagon was at the station with some of the college boys, and as they willingly agreed to bring it up with them, Jim started on the homeward drive with far happier thoughts than he had when coming down. He forgot all about Sam, who was being whirled away to the big, unknown city, though that faithful friend was carrying with him all the hopes and fears of many long years. Instead of thinking about the traveler, Jim pictured to himself his grandfather's pleased surprise when he should see the chair. Then he began to be troubled afresh about the bitter outburst of temper of which he had been guilty. He realized he ought to have known better than to have spoken that way to an old man — and a sick one at that. His face slowly flushed with shame. How could he ever make up to his grand-

father for having acted the way he did? For though he couldn't take back the words, he had meant them and they had already been spoken, he ought to have uttered them in such a way they would not have hurt so; and he knew they must have hurt his grandfather's feelings, because his own heart thumped so very much harder than usual as he thought about the recent unhappy scene.

"Oh, hum," he said, half aloud, as he hurried the mare along a little faster when he heard the noon whistle blow, "I don't see how I ever could have said what I did. I wonder how I ever dared! I'm almost afraid to see him again. I wonder what he'll say to me, anyway. I ought to have known better than to speak the way I did, for, in spite of the way he acted he's all the family I've got, next to my father. Golly! What'd my father say if he knew what I'd done?"

As Jim turned this question over and over in his mind his regret and shame deepened so it was a very uncomfortable boy, who, after putting the mare in the barn, at last turned toward the house. He dreaded the coming interview and wished it were over. Determined, however, to be polite in the future, no matter what his grandfather might do or say, Jim drew a long breath and quietly stepped into the room. His grandfather's greeting was a peevish one.

"Seems to me you must have driven faster'n usual for such a hot day, Jim. How long'll it be, I wonder, before you learn moderation? You're

home earlier'n I expected you. Weren't careless, were you?"

"I don't think so, grandpa," answered the boy.

"Well, I hope the mare'll be none the worse for it. Rubbed her down well, did you? Better let her rest a bit before you feed her. Don't see how I'm ever going to manage while Sam's away, with nobody to look out for things, and me about as much use as a dead door-nail."

Jim laughed in spite of himself as he wondered just how dead a door-nail could be. He did not feel hurt at his grandfather's remark, unkind as it was. So he said good-naturedly:

"I'll do the best *I* can, grandpa, just you tell me what you want done and I guess I can manage 'thout Sam all right. I hope I have been of some use on this farm before to-day. What'll I do now?"

"My dinner ready yet?"

"Ellen said she was going to dish it up in a few minutes. It smelled pretty good as I came through the kitchen."

"Well, I never did see minutes so long in all my born days as those Ellen talks about. I shall be glad when the time comes that we can get along without any women folks again. Gosh all hemlock, how 'tarnation mad I am just sitting here and doing nothing!" He pounded the arms of his chair with clenched fists and glowered at Jim.

The boy thought of the surprise, even then being brought nearer and nearer to the farm, and smiled.

How glad he would be to give his grandfather such happiness as that chair could bring. He thought of pushing it out to the bridge that evening when the sun would be down and the air would be a little cooler, and wondered if he could not get up to the camp, when the impatient tones of the invalid's voice recalled his wandering thoughts.

"Quit your dreaming, Jim. Try and be practical a moment, won't you? What you thinking about, anyway? The secret room, eh?"

"No, sir, I wasn't," said Jim. "But, oh, grandpa, just let me tell you what we found out about it this morning —"

"Not now," interrupted Mr. Burton, "by and by. Here comes Ellen at last with something to eat and I should think it was about time. Seems to me this is the longest day in the year and it isn't half over with yet."

"I hope Skip and I didn't wake you up this morning, grandpa; we tried to be as quiet as we could," said Jim. He helped Ellen place the tray with its appetizing dinner on the table in front of the old man who looked up with a short laugh.

"D'you suppose I sleep like an elephant or a pig?" he asked. "Of course I heard you; but there, never mind. I've got to grin and bear things from now on, I s'pose. Oh, to think of always living in the same room! To live, eat, sleep right here!"

"We can easily get you into another part of the house, Mr. Burton," pleasantly answered Ellen, as

she patted the pillows back of his head and spread out his napkin; "if you'd only let us draw your chair —"

"Over this hard wood floor?" interrupted Mr. Burton, impatiently. "Well, I guess not! I guess I didn't help to lay this solid oak floor down so's to have it scraped up by dragging heavy weights over it. No, here I stay, like a helpless log of wood till I can walk out on my two legs. And if that time never comes, why — Well, go and get your dinner now, Jim, and then come right back for I want you to go up to the camp and pay Dr. Brown the rest of his bill. He's spending the day with Mr. Lyford and you know how I hate to owe any one a cent."

Yes, Jim did know the deep-seated aversion Mr. Burton had to unpaid bills, so as soon as he had eaten he went back to get the money and then go up to the camp. He found his grandfather more impatient than ever, for, having given Sam all the loose change he had with him, he now discovered that he needed more money than he had in the house in order to discharge this rather trifling debt.

"Let it go till to-morrow, grandpa," suggested Jim, not realizing the storm of protest which would follow.

"Let it go!" cried Mr. Burton, "I'd like to see myself. I told him I'd pay it to-day, and so I shall. I don't owe a cent to any one in the world and don't intend to, neither. I couldn't sleep to-night with that bill unpaid, particularly as I've told the doctor I'd send you up with the money this afternoon."

"But, grandpa, he only left it this morning. I don't believe he expected you to pay it right away."

"Don't care what he expected! I only know I'm going to pay that bill."

"Well, then, let me ride Judge down to the bank for some money. He hasn't been out to-day and I don't think it's too hot."

"Yes, 'tis. No, you shan't go. I'll have to borrow from you, much as I hate to. Lend me five dollars of your money, will you? Then you can go to the bank as soon as it's cooler — to-morrow, I hope — and deposit the check from the college as well as get me some cash to have on hand."

Jim hesitated. He did not want to tell his grandfather about the chair before it came and yet how else could he explain the fact that his money was gone? His confusion was noticed by his grandfather who said in a surprised way:

"Don't you want to lend me that money, Jim?"

"Yes, sir, I'd like to lend it to you all right; indeed I would, grandpa, only — only won't you just wait till to-morrow morning?"

Instead of looking at Mr. Burton, the boy involuntarily gazed out of the window to see if he might not catch a glimpse of the longed-for chair. If only it were to come now! His grandfather saw that he did not look at him and at once thought there was something evasive in Jim's manner. So he said, shortly:

"No, I won't wait, Jim, that bill's going to be paid to-day. Never knew you to be so backward,

either, about obliging me. You afraid you won't get it back? "

" Oh, grandpa, you know better'n that."

" Well, then, go and get it."

" Grandpa, I haven't got it."

" Haven't got it? What do you mean, Jim? "

" I've spent it."

" What! All of it? The whole ten dollars and sixty cents? "

" Yes, sir, and the money I've earned at the camp, too, these last three weeks."

" Might I ask for what? "

" Please wait till to-morrow, grandpa — till this evening, then. I'll tell you just as soon as the camp wagon comes back from the station. Oh —" Here Jim clapped his hand over his mouth in great confusion. Surely he had said too much! His grandfather would guess, had done so already! But that was not so. The sick old man, made irritable by an early awakening, the excitement attending Sam's unwonted departure for the far-off city, and the extreme and nerve-trying heat, noticed only one thing. The money had been spent. Jim's actions had made it impossible for him to pay that bill. The fact that he only owed a small amount and that to an old friend made no difference. Jim had made it impossible for him to have his own way. He completely lost his temper and scolded the boy in a very unnecessary and unkind way. Jim stood quite white and still in the doorway and never said a word. He clenched his hands and bit his

lips in order to keep the hurt and angry tears back. He kept saying to himself, "Father wouldn't want me to. I mustn't." So he conquered his great desire to answer back. He wanted to justify himself but he was so afraid that if he spoke at all he, too, would lose his temper again, that he was glad and thankful he *could* keep silent.

Suddenly his grandfather stopped talking and began to laugh. "Guess that makes us about even, now, doesn't it, Jim? You had your innings in the morning; I have mine in the afternoon." He laughed again, but it was not good to hear him. "Well," he continued, "the money's yours. You spent it. I don't want to know how, but you've got to go to the village and get some from the bank, for that bill's got to be paid to-night, and you've got to walk, too. I ain't a-going to let any horse out in such weather as this. And the walk'll perhaps teach you how necessary it is to save your money. I suppose you've spent your pennies and your dollars in all kinds of foolishness down at the store. Or did you give it to Sam?"

"No, sir, I—"

"Well, I don't want to know how you spent it," interrupted his grandfather. "It's gone, that's enough. And now you walk to the bank and cash this check for me."

Hastily scrawling the amount wanted in his check book he handed the slip of paper to Jim who took it without a word and, turning, groped his way from the room and through the long hall to the kitchen.

He stumbled down the steps and falling into the nearest chair buried his head in his arms as he threw them out on the table. He felt ever so much worse than he had felt in the morning. Now he was sure he was so unhappy and lonely he wanted to die. And then he thought how he had tried and succeeded in keeping his temper. He was comforted by that knowledge and it almost made the thought of walking to the village bearable. He knew he must start at once in order to get there before the bank closed. It was now almost two o'clock and the bank closed in an hour, and the village was three miles away. With a sigh he rose and crossed the kitchen to the porch. Under the eaves was a thermometer which, though now in the shade, registered nearly ninety-eight degrees. Jim gave a long, low whistle.

"And I'm to walk three miles there, three back in this heat," he murmured. "I bet I won't do it. I'd like to see myself. I'll go to the camp and borrow a bicycle." Then he remembered his grandfather's dislike, even horror, of borrowing, and, too, he might get it out of order and if he did he now had no money with which to have it fixed. While he teetered back and forth on the top step of the porch, uncertain just what to do, the wagon from the camp came rattling up to the door. Jim stepped forward to unload the chair.

"What kind of weather do you call this?" laughingly asked one of the men, wiping his fore-

head with a hot, dusty hand. "I never knew anything like it."

"Does beat all, don't it?" agreed Jim. "I never knew such hot weather in these parts before. But it can't last forever."

"Well, that's one comfort. You'd better drive the cow up to the camp to-night, however, before you milk her, or the milk'll sour before you can get it to us."

Jim laughed and as they drove off, slowly followed the wagon out to the road. He had decided to walk to the village. His life-long training would not permit him to disobey his grandfather. He could not borrow a wheel, nor ride the horse. The fear of overheating himself was not strong enough to make him run the risk of injuring one of the horses. Ailing live stock was a very serious matter to any one whose livelihood depended upon the strength and condition of their horses. So poor Jim saw no other way open before him save a long and dusty six-mile walk in the middle of a hot July day, in order to satisfy the whim of a selfish old man.

He swallowed hard, tied his shoestrings into good, tight knots and stepped manfully forward. At the corner of the house, beneath the windows of his grandfather's room, he stopped suddenly and looked up at the sky. It was such a funny color. So bright and clear yet full of a strange light and there was such a deep shadow on the bridge and on the

mountain road that Jim wondered if a terrible storm was coming up. Almost immediately the cause of this queer light showed itself. A big, blanket-shaped cloud, twisting and curling down the mountainside, appeared directly over the camp. Its edges looked like green and yellow snakes trying to get out of the middle of a dark brown blanket. Jim gazed in fascinated silence at the unusual sight. Then a hot, dry wind which came tearing down the ravine back of him surged against him with such force he almost lost his balance. He gave a little gasp and darted out into the road for his hat which had blown off and which he could not catch. It went careening over the opposite meadows and was soon out of sight. But Jim no longer thought of his hat. The wind that blew it away met the wind that was blowing the cloud down the mountainside, and in a second the boy found himself flung violently against the corner pillar of the piazza. Suddenly it grew very dark. The air was filled with a queer, yellow light, and a low, moaning sound that came from the woods on the mountain soon changed into an angry roar as the wind, grown strong and terrible, swept over the brow of the mountain and blew down to meet and wrestle with the wind that, no less terrible, was tearing its destructive way through the glen. The two currents of air, heavily charged with electricity, met and fought for the mastery. Lightning darted in every direction. Chickens, small bushes, washing from the line, and chairs from the porch, everything movable, or so

it seemed to Jim, was borne on high by the rushing wind. It also turned and twisted him around, trying to dislodge him, but in vain. His position, so long as he stayed flat on the piazza floor with both arms around the post, was secure. But how long he could stay that way he did not know and he didn't dare let go long enough to dash for the front door. Even as he thought of doing so he heard it slam noisily to and then his grandfather's voice, for one brief instant, rose above the clamor and Ellen's face appeared at one of the windows as she leaned out to shut the blinds. She did not see Jim and though he shouted to her he could not make her hear and a moment later she was at another window. She was securing the blinds all over the house and Jim was sorry he could not help.

He wriggled around so he could look up on the mountain and what he saw at the camp filled him with terror. One after another the tents were begun to blow down the mountain toward him that, in spite of his fear, Jim had to laugh. Books, tablecloths, camp-stools, a basket, a frying-pan, a sun-bonnet and a small, squalling kitten, all flew madly down the road, one after another, and joined the general havoc which had come from the direction being blown down or were already prone on the ground, writhing about as though alive and in pain. The guy-ropes were snapping with a noise like the sharp crack of a pistol being discharged as fast as possible. The air seemed filled with all the camp paraphernalia. And in a second such funny things

of the glen. The corner of the big, gray stone house and the dooryard, right at the mouth of the ravine, seemed to be in the center of the storm. Things would fly over the bridge toward the house, careen round in a complete circle in the dooryard and tear madly over the meadow to follow the course of the brook on its way to the village. Though Jim was on the edge of the wind it proved almost too strong for even his sturdy arms, but he managed to hold on even while he wondered how soon he'd have to give in and be tossed to and fro like the things he had already watched fly over the meadow. His eyes were blinded again and again by the flashes of blue and vicious lightning which played almost incessantly all around him, and he longed with all his might for the rain to come, for then the wind would go down and the terrible heat would be drowned out; or so he thought.

The rain did not come, however, and the heat grew ten times greater. And when, after a particularly vivid flash of lightning, Jim opened his eyes he forgot his own danger and jumping to his feet, started to run to the camp. Little Gertrude, Mr. Lyford's youngest child, was being blown directly toward the bridge. Her short, white dress billowed out like a balloon, yet she might, even though helped in a measure by that fact, prove too heavy for the wind. She might fall in the pool and she could not swim. Jim knew he must get to the bridge in time to catch her. Yet running across the lawn was almost as though he were try-

ing to move a stone wall. The wind was still too strong for him. He was tossed about and then flung face down again on the ground. As he fell he saw the rest of the campers, half running, half flying, come blowing down the mountain toward him. A flash of white hovered for an instant over him. He made a frantic and successful effort to grasp it — whatever it was — from the wind's vindictive grasp. As the tossed-about bundle fell heavily at his side, he cried with thankfulness, for there was little Gertrude, very much frightened but unhurt. She twined her arms about Jim's neck for a second but did not speak, and the boy, realizing that they were quite too near the black depths of the pool for safety, began as carefully as he could, with one protecting arm around Gertrude, to crawl back to the house.

"Will the wind never stop?" he thought. "I shouldn't wonder if this was the end of the world."

The two children, face downward in the middle of the hot, dusty road, dug their hands and feet into the earth for protection and held their breath. The fury of the dry, electrical storm suddenly increased to its climax. The wind whirled in fury over them. And then in a moment, *IT* came, the brilliant, the terrible flash of blinding light which blotted everything out of existence, as it followed what was afterward called "The Big Wind," which tore along in its mad career over the parched earth, leaving destruction and havoc behind.

What had happened?

CHAPTER XVI

AFTERWARD

AFTER many years, or so it seemed to Jim, he feebly opened his eyes. Surprised at finding himself still alive and in the world, which, after all, had not come to an end, he slowly drew himself together and sat up to look around. He was very thankful that the wind had stopped blowing. Then he quickly closed his eyes again and shivered, not from cold, for it was still close and hot — but because he could not bear to look at the scene all around him. Fence rails were strewn about, the bridge was broken, the remains of the wood-shed and chicken-coops littered the dooryard way out to the road and here and there, stretched prone on the ground in many queer attitudes, were the people from the camp. The meaning of this picture, in one brief glance, impressed itself on Jim's brain and made him open his eyes once more. Was every one dead? He caught his breath with fear and then glanced down at Gertrude and saw that she, at least, was alive. She looked up at him in a dazed way and tried to speak, but as her voice was very weak, Jim had to bend low to catch the whispered words: "We were all struck by lightning."

Of course! Struck by lightning! That was the reason Jim felt so trembly and all of a tingle way to the tips of his fingers and toes. Wondering why he had not thought of that before he made a great effort and, managing to scramble to his feet, helped Gertrude to the piazza; after which, with a shrinking dread at his heart that he might not find one of her family or friends alive, he turned around toward them. To his unspeakable relief he saw that they, too, had only been stunned. With dazed, uncertain gestures, as though awakening from a deep, long sleep, the college men and members of Mr. Lyford's family were slowly regaining their senses. Jim ran first to one and then another and gave them what help he could. In a few minutes they were all on the piazza. Mrs. Lyford sat back in a low rocking chair and took little Gertrude on her lap. The others settled themselves comfortably in different ways and each tried hard to regain his or her self-control. At last Dr. Brown said in a voice that trembled with emotion, though he tried to speak as naturally as he could:

"It's getting cooler."

"That's so," answered Mr. Lyford, and when his wife said:

"Thank God for that and that we are all still here," her husband leaned forward and kissed her, and then the tension was broken and every one found that life was to go on in the same old way after all.

"Guess I'd better find out if grandpa's all right,"

said Jim, and he started toward the front door just as Ellen opened it.

"We're safe," she cried, in answer to his unspoken question, and when she found that no one outdoors had suffered anything more serious than a great feeling of numbness which had not yet entirely passed off, she added: "Well, there, I guess I'll go make some good, strong coffee for all hands. I guess we need it now, if we ever did. You want to come help, Mis' Lyford? And, Jim, your grandpa must want to look at you. S'pose you jest step in an' let him see you're still in the land of the living."

"All right," answered Jim, but before he had crossed the threshold a loud hallo from down the road caught his ear and he saw Mr. Jones astride one of his horses, with Skip clinging on behind, come galloping along toward them as fast as the big roan could cover the ground. Jim turned with the others to meet them. "What is it?" he cried.

The horse stopped, Mr. Jones called out, "Your house's afire," and Skip, slipping off to the piazza, yelled:

"The lightning must have struck it! Gee whizz, hurry up and come on!"

When the two boys, in advance of the others, ran around to the kitchen it was to see a broad sheet of flame bursting from the roof of the extension, while curling wreaths of smoke were pouring out of the low windows beneath the eaves. The wheel chair, still done up in burlap, stood under the

big maple, and the first thing Jim did was to drag it to a safe place where there was no danger of it catching fire.

Then he joined the others who were trying bravely, but in vain, to save the low, frame extension which for many years had nestled, as though for protection, to the side of the old, stone house. When they saw that the fire was waging an unequal war against them, they turned their energy to the barn and those outbuildings the wind had spared. Ellen had succeeded in closing all the windows and blinds in the rear so, though it would probably be scorched, the house was in no danger of being destroyed. This was not true of the frame buildings, however, which as a result of almost a month of rainless and hot weather, were as dry as tinder. Once they caught fire, it would be impossible to save them. So horse blankets, drenched in the brook, and buckets of water were almost hurled from one willing hand to another, in the effort to protect the dry, shingled roofs from the flying sparks. The horses and cows were easily led from the barn and turned loose in the rocky pasture. The pigs and what poultry had not been blown away were also shooed up toward the ravine and then — suddenly, Jim thought of those papers in his grandfather's desk. They also must be saved. He must get them, and at once. He could not wait to run around to the front of the house and get the key from his grandfather, and then, too, the old man might refuse to give it up; he might think the dan-

ger too great. Jim thought of this in a flash and realized that he must get along without the key. He must manage in some way to bring the precious papers to his grandfather before Mr. Burton realized their predicament. He raced to the porch and looked in at the kitchen window. The fire had not yet burned through the ceiling.

The room was more or less filled with smoke but as no flames were to be seen, Jim thought he could dash in, break open the desk, get the papers and be out again without breathing more than once or twice. He ran down to the brook for a stone with which to break open the desk. Those who would have stopped him were so busy fighting the fire in other places that no one noticed what he was doing. If they had, of course he would not have been allowed to do what he did. So he got his stone, and then laid down in the shallow bed of the brook and rolled over two or three times, thus completely saturating his clothes.

As he hurried back to the kitchen he dripped water like a sieve and his shoes made a funny, sucking sound that reminded him of the way the pump acted sometimes in dry weather. He kicked the door open and ran to the desk. The lid was shattered with the first blow from the heavy stone which Jim dropped to the floor. The room was now so full of smoke that his eyes smarted and his breath came in short, quick gasps. It was not so easy to breathe as he had thought it would be. But before he turned to grope his way to the door, the precious

papers were, every one of them, safely tucked within his flannel shirt; and then he couldn't see his way out! The now densely smoke-filled room was all of the same uniform grayness, and the boy knew he would have to feel his way along the wall which made two angles, before he could reach the open door. He was afraid to trust himself out in the midst of that surging, billowing mass of smoke. So he closed his eyes and held one hand over his tightly buttoned up shirt and with the other sliding over the smooth wall stumbled forward.

A little crackling sound was then heard, something he had not noticed before. He involuntarily opened his eyes and saw that the draft he had made when he burst open the kitchen door had now not only blown the smoke up the back stairs, leaving the kitchen comparatively clear, but had fanned the flames above and encouraged them to come down through the ceiling. Jim could see them curling and darting back and forth, as they slowly ate their bright yellow way through the woodwork over the door. Then, even as he started to run across the floor from the far corner where he found himself, for he had been groping his way from, instead of toward, safety, the whole room suddenly burst into flames. Jim literally ran through the fire. He heard some one scream and wondered if it was he who was making such a noise and then, plunging through what seemed to be a thousand firecrackers and rockets all going off at the same time, he stumbled across the threshold and for the second time

that day fell face down on the earth; and as he fell, he thought that, after all, what the lightning had spared the fire must have claimed.

“He’ll be all right in another hour or two, Mr. Burton; don’t you worry a mite more.”

“You certain sure, doctor?”

“I certainly am. He inhaled very little smoke and the burns, though painful, are not at all serious. They are quite superficial. Just keep his face and hands well covered with the linen wet with the solution and by the time the pain has gone he’ll be rested enough to get up. To-morrow morning, I guess, at the usual time.”

“How thankful I am you were here, doctor.”

“So’m I. I’ve had more excitement in the last few hours than in all my professional career. And yet I’ve only had to give a few pills for nerves and to prescribe a lotion for this youngster’s burns. Hard on me, eh?”

Jim wondered who it was his grandfather and Dr. Brown were talking about, but as his eyes were covered with a cool, wet bandage, and he was too tired to ask he lay quite still, wondering, and so fell asleep. When he waked it was to find he had almost slept the clock around—or in other words, he had been asleep for over twenty hours. And even now, though wide awake, he felt too listless to move. He lay and blinked at the ceiling on which the afternoon sun was throwing fantastic

shadows and then, idly wondering just why he should be in his grandfather's bed and why everything was so quiet, he moved so as to look around the room. The first thing he saw was his grandfather sitting in the wheel chair. Though the old man's eyes were closed he was not asleep, and as soon as he heard Jim stir he rolled the chair over to the bedside.

Jim suddenly remembered everything that had happened. *He* was the boy his grandfather and the doctor had been talking about the evening before. He raised his hands and saw that they were both bandaged. He felt his head and discovered that that, too, or the most of it, was covered with a wet compress. He tried to sit up, but by this time his grandfather had reached the bed and then something so queer, so unexpected happened, that Jim felt too embarrassed for several minutes to even think about getting up. His grandfather put his arms around him and gently drawing the boy's funny-looking head to him, leaned down and kissed him.

Jim scarcely knew what to do. Never since he could remember had his grandfather kissed him. He hadn't any idea what it all meant but he liked it and managed somehow to get a bandage-covered arm around the old, stooping shoulders.

"Never mind, grandpa," he whispered, thinking that, after all, the papers had not been saved. "Don't feel so bad. Is it because the papers — my father's letters, were burnt?"

Mr. Burton could not speak. He only shook his head. Jim felt his big, trembling hand close tenderly about his in the cool bandage. Then in a shaking voice the man said:

"Jim, boy, the papers weren't burnt—they weren't even scorched. It's because I'm sorry for my past mistakes that I feel as I do. Jim, I ask your pardon for not having been a better grandfather to you."

"Oh, grandpa, don't! Please don't say that!" interrupted Jim. "If you only knew how awful mad I've been at you sometimes you wouldn't feel that way."

"Yes, I would, too," stoutly affirmed his grandfather, "for, in the first place, if I hadn't acted like a mean, selfish man, too wrapped up in himself, like a gnarled, old nut, too hard to crack, you'd never had a chance to feel any other than the right way toward me. Everything's been my fault. I see that now, and what's more—I'm going to change from this time on. Jim, you've saved my soul alive." Mr. Burton looked lovingly down into the puzzled face gazing up at him and the tears came to his fine, old eyes. "I don't believe you understand half of what I've been saying," he added.

"Yes, I do," answered Jim, with a little, nervous laugh, vainly trying to say the right word. Finally he whispered, "You said just now, grandpa, that you were a gnarled, old nut, too hard to crack, didn't you?"

"Yes, Jim, I did."

“Well, you ain’t; not one bit of it, because I’m the nut cracker!”

“Well, well, Jim, my boy,” then said his grandfather, as he tucked a pillow beneath the boy’s head, and laughed heartily at the way Jim had changed an embarrassing situation to a natural one. “You do know a thing or two, don’t you? Well, now, feeling pretty comfortable, are you? Because we’re going to talk things all over and I don’t want you to get tired before we’re through. What is it? You want anything, Jim?”

“I’m awfully hungry, grandpa.”

“I declare to Goshen, of course you are and here I’ve been sitting, talking, full as a tick, while you’ve had to listen on an empty stomach, that’s been empty more’n twenty hours.”

“Well, it’s been asleep most of the time,” answered the boy, “so it hasn’t minded till now.”

“Well, we’ll fill it up as soon as possible,” Mr. Burton answered — he rang the bell for Ellen — “and while you’re eating I’ll do the talking.”

CHAPTER XVII

CONFIDENCES

AFTER many awkward attempts to use his bandaged hands, Ellen finally had to butter his bread, cut his meat and pour out his milk for Jim. Then, when he declared himself quite comfortable and able to care for himself, she returned to her work in the kitchen and Mr. Burton began his story.

“You see, Jim,” he said, “I couldn’t get over my wife’s death. I brooded over it too much and by and by when he grew up your father found ’twa’n’t any use to tell me things because I wasn’t sociable. First thing I knew I discovered my only child was a stranger to me. I was too proud to be friendly then, when I could. Afterward, when I would, ’twas too late. He went away to college, stayed four years, married one of his classmates and brought her home.”

“My mother,” whispered Jim.

“Yes, your mother, my boy, and the prettiest and sweetest young woman I’d ever wish to see. She tried as hard as she could to make us three a united and happy family but ’twa’n’t any use. And then when she died and I found I couldn’t comfort my son any, I realized how wrong it is to indulge

your own feelings too much. Never mind what happens to you in the future, Jim, don't you ever make the mistake of thinking your sorrow's the greatest and that *you* are the most important person on this earth — or you'll be as wrong as I was. I see my mistake now — when too late. Well, we three lived on, after a fashion, you, your pa and me, and things came to such a pass that it only needed the loss of that locket and chain to make us two flare up. I accused him of carelessness in letting you wear it every day, he answered back and one word led to another till first thing I knew he'd gone."

"But he wrote to you?"

"Yes, but wouldn't come back. And I still let pride own *me* and wouldn't ask him to come. I — oh, I can't talk any more about *that*, Jim. Well, Sam and I talked the locket and chain all over night before last and I guess the old, tame crow was the rascal, without doubt, that did the mischief. And now Sam's hunting for my boy — my son. If he doesn't find him, if he's too late, what shall I do?"

He looked down at Jim as though asking for advice and help.

"Don't think about that part of it, grandpa," interrupted Jim, "just bet that Sam'll find him. We've just got to believe he will, you know, or we'll — we'll bust!"

"Well, we don't want to do that, do we?" replied his grandfather, smilingly. "And you know, my boy, no matter how much you wanted to go, this search for your father, it seems to me, now that

I can't go, rightly belongs to Sam. For he's older, he's insisted on taking some of his own money, because he was afraid mine wouldn't be enough, and he's less liable to be fooled by any shysters he's likely to run across in the big cities. They say the woods are full of them down there. Don't you think I'm right?" Neither Jim or his grandfather thought it was funny that the cities might contain woods as well as "shysters."

"I s'pose — yes, you're right, grandpa," assented Jim, "and I don't feel nearly so bad about not going as I did at first — now that we're friends." As he whispered these last words, Jim's face grew quite red, but he just had to say them and, when he saw what pleasure they gave his grandfather, was glad he had spoken.

"Good for you, Jim; good for you. I'm proud to hear you say those words. We'll certainly work together from this time on, and if Sam does come back alone we'll be better able owing to this talk, to help each other bear it, than we otherwise would, won't we?"

"Yes, grandpa, but I bet my father's coming back, too. I just know he is."

"You almost make me believe that he is also," said Mr. Burton, smiling at the other's earnestness. "Sam'll find him if any one can. He's slow of speech but shrewd and quick to think and seldom makes mistakes. I'd trust him sooner'n I trust any one else."

"Where's he going first?"

"To your mother's old home. Your father's last letter came from there. And that was seven years ago."

"Why, grandpa, haven't you heard from him in all that time?"

"Not from him, Jim, but about him. The old minister who married your father and mother sent me word about him up to the time he died, which was four years ago. Then the hired girl, whose name was Laura Green, who lived in the parsonage and took care of the minister who was a bachelor, sent me some letters after his death. She said she'd keep on sending any word that came, just the same as her master had done, and so, for a time, she did. Then she moved away—to Kansas, I think, and since then all news from your father has stopped. I have written the postmaster and all sorts of people and no one can tell me a thing about her. She knew your father's address and no one else did. And so, of course, till I can find her whereabouts, I can't send for him to come home."

"But when she sent you the letter, didn't she send you the address?"

"No, she, or some one else, had carefully cut it off."

"Why do you s'pose they did that?"

"I don't know for sure, Jim, but I think it is because your father said that unless I *asked* him to come home he'd never come or ever let me know where he was."

"But I thought you said you did ask him."

"I did, but not till after the minister died and then Laura Green, who was to have forwarded the letters, disappeared."

"Well, grandpa, do you know what I think? I just bet she knows something that she's afraid you'll find out, and so has hidden from you."

"That is exactly what Sam and I think, Jim. And Sam is going to ferret her out if it takes forever."

"Well, I'm mighty glad of that," replied the boy, "for I just know my father wouldn't desert us both this way. That hired girl is at the bottom of it. You just wait and see if she isn't."

"Of course there must be some reason for this long silence," said the man, only too glad to agree with Jim; "and the evidence certainly does indicate that she's guilty in some way for it. But I do reproach myself for not writing to him before the minister died. I didn't know he'd die just then, though, did I? The last time he wrote to me he asked me not to wait till it should be too late. The old man seemed to have a premonition something was going to happen, said I might die before I could make up with my boy, who was at that time in Borneo. And then he was the one to be taken after all. Queer, how little we know what's coming to us, isn't it?"

"In Borneo," sighed Jim. "Oh, grandpa, what lots he'll have to tell us."

"Yes; and the time before when I heard, he'd been way up to Sitka."

“What do you s’pose he was doing?”

“It’s my impression he is some kind of a trader. But ’tain’t no use wishing and guessing; we must be patient as we can till we hear from Sam.”

“When’ll that be?”

“Not for a whole week, and may be longer, for the minister lived in a little town in New Jersey and the hired girl out in Kansas — or the postmaster says she moved there. So Sam will probably have to go out there after her. He said he’d telegraph me from there. And now that brings us down to yesterday. Do you know, Jim, if it hadn’t been for the weather’s being so hot, and Sam going away an’ all, I don’t believe I’d ever have been so cantankerous about your going to the bank.”

“Of course you wouldn’t, grandpa, I know that all right.”

“And so,” continued Mr. Burton, “when that wind came up, with you out in it, I thought, well, I can’t tell you just what my thoughts were, Jim, but they were not pleasant ones. Well, Ellen flew around and closed the windows and shutters and I sat there helpless, so far away from the window that I couldn’t look out. But I did considerable hollering to find out how things were going on, and Ellen had no more’n told me you were all safe than I heard Mr. Jones ride up and Skip call out, ‘Fire.’ Then you all raced around the corner of the house and I was left alone for about a thousand years, I guess long enough at any rate to see my past life, and by the time I had made up my mind

that I'd be burned up all alone and no one to care, they brought you in here."

"Who did?"

"All creation, seems to me, and laid you on my bed. But the doctor got right to work and shooed most of them out. Then 'twa'n't long before he told me you were all right."

"Yes, I heard him say that," interrupted Jim, "only I was so tired I went right off to sleep just then so I don't know what happened next."

"Well, I'd no sooner got it through my head that you were not killed, after all, when Skip appeared with this." Here Mr. Burton patted the arms of the new chair in an affectionate way that pleased Jim very much. "He was so anxious for me to see it that he said he guessed you'd not mind if he didn't wait till you could give it to me yourself."

"That was all right," assented Jim.

"When he told me who it was from and how you got it, you can bet your bottom dollar I felt pretty mean. I don't suppose I'll ever get over it. I—"

"Oh, yes, you will," then interrupted Jim, anxious to change the subject. "Then what happened?"

"Well, after Dr. Brown had trussed you up like a fowl going to market, and you were so sound asleep I don't believe an earthquake would have waked you, Skip managed to shift me into the chair and then trundled me out to the road and around the house to see what damage had been done."

"How much burned up, grandpa?"

"Well, you just wait and see for yourself tomorrow, Jim. I guess you may be some surprised. But the point I want to emphasize now is this: We are going to live in the house, not the extension, from this time on, and have a family."

"What family, grandpa? What do you mean?"

"I mean the campers. They have been busy all day collecting their various duds—I guess they were pretty well scattered from Dan to Beersheba—and getting settled in the upstairs bedrooms. I thought you'd very likely choose the room back of this for yours, so I kept it for you but told them to go ahead and do anything they wanted above stairs. Ellen and Mrs. Lyford have been pretty considerable busy, too, in the old kitchen and store-rooms, across the hall. And last night, while Skip wheeled me up and down the road for a spell, I had a good chance to see how kinder homelike the old house looked, all lighted up, with laughter and talking going on on the piazza. I guess this house is going to be a home from now on, for *people*, and not a casket to hold memories that only belong to one old man and can't do him or any one else any good. Does that please you, my boy? Well, I thought it would. And I just want to tell you, too, that the Lyfords can't talk about what you did for them, in grabbing hold of Gertrude, without pretty nigh crying."

"'Twa'n't anything that any one else wouldn't have done," interrupted Jim, blushing.

"I don't suppose it was," continued Mr. Burton, "but you happened to be the one, you see, and after all I guess 'twas a brave thing, Jim. They want to do something, anything, to show you how grateful they are to you."

"Oh, grandpa, I wish you'd tell them not to say a word about it," begged Jim. "I'll be so embarrassed if they do I won't know how to act."

"All right, Jim," laughed his grandfather, "if that is the way you feel about it, I'll see what I can do for you. And now I have finished my story; it has been a pretty long one, too, hasn't it? Seems to me it's your turn to talk awhile. D'you want to tell me what you and Skip did upstairs? When were you hunting for the secret room, anyway? Only yesterday morning? It seems as though it was last year, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does," replied the boy. "And say, grandpa, I want to ask you something. Didn't my father ever hunt for that secret room? He and Sam must have grown up the same way Skip and I have, and played and worked together. Didn't they ever try to find out anything?"

"If they did, 'twas unbeknownst to me." Mr. Burton mused as he settled back more comfortably in his chair, "and I don't think they did. Sam was always a worker — he didn't have time to poke around in other matters when his chores were done, and I've heard him tell since he grew up, that he'd never taken any stock in that reward, anyway. I guess your father felt much the same way, too, and

then you know he was away to college four winters, and soon lost what little interest he may have had in the house and anything pertaining to it. Well, what did you discover when you were up there? Anything?"

Jim told his story in a very few words. He was gratified to notice that his grandfather seemed much impressed with the results of the measurements he and Skip had made. More than once before he finished, Mr. Burton nodded his head in pleased silence, but did not speak till he had listened to all that Jim had to say. Then he exclaimed:

"Well, well, I want to know! It does seem's though you were hot on the trail, doesn't it? And perhaps after all, there's more truth than fiction in the crazy counterfeiter's story. Maybe it's just as well for you to find the way into that secret room as soon as possible, so if Job Greenough does come around, you'll get the reward first for finding the room and then for capturing him. Seems to me you're just as likely to discover the one as capture the other. And though I'd hate to have you break a hole in the wall up there, I guess you'll have to in order to get in that secret room. Of course it must be behind that wall space and those closets."

"How d'you suppose those counterfeiters got in and out, though? Let us hunt one more day, grandpa, for I just hate not to find the right way in."

"All right, Jim, take as long as you like," answered Mr. Burton. "I don't care. Only let me know in plenty of time to write to Washington."

“I will, grandpa,” laughed Jim, “and perhaps by to-morrow night there will be so much news that you will want to send a telegram instead of a letter.”

“Mebbe, young feller, but in the meantime you need all the rest you can get. So let me wet those bandages again, and then you turn over and go to sleep. Unless your hands heal up a lot during the night, I guess you’ll have to do the bossing and Skip most of the work. How do you suppose he’ll like that?”



The room was now so full of smoke that his eyes smarted.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT THE FIRE DID

THE first thing Jim did in the morning was to examine his hands and arms. He was delighted to find that the cooling lotion had done its work so well that the burns were almost healed. Then, forgetting the bandages that still encircled his head, he sprang out of bed, completely rested, and dressed as quickly as he could. As he opened the door into the hall, the old-fashioned clock, which some one had wound up, struck seven. It startled Jim a little, it sounded so strange, and yet it seemed so homelike and familiar, it pleased him immensely. "My, but I'm glad," he thought, "that I'll not have to live in that cooped-up little extension any more."

He crossed the hall and entered what used to be the office. Through the farther door he glanced into the big dining room which ran across the end of the house. From its cool and shady space came a subdued, happy sound of voices and laughter, and the cheerful clatter of dishes. The campers were having breakfast. Jim no sooner discovered them than they saw him and then ensued such a medley of cheers, exclamations and hand-clapping that Jim

found some difficulty in making his way to the place which had been reserved for him. His grandfather and Skip were there also, and though Jim never remembered such a happy meal, it came to an end none too soon. Many times he and his chum exchanged glances with each other about their secret. They were anxious to be off to their work. Mr. Burton, in his wheel chair, was the first one to leave the table, and soon after all the campers were ready to go to the fields and the laboratory. This outbuilding, fortunately, had suffered but little from the storm. Gertrude and Helen fastened on big aprons over their pretty dresses and began to clear away the table. Ellen and Mrs. Lyford went to their work in the kitchen; later to go upstairs and "do" the bedrooms. Already the house seemed lived in and homelike. Yet Jim and Skip nudged each other with delight as they whispered, "Won't the girls be surprised when they know?" and, "Who would have s'posed a mystery belonged to this house?"

"It doesn't look any different from any other home now, does it?" said Skip, "except that it's ever so much nicer."

They wheeled Mr. Burton out to the hall toward the back door. Jim said he wanted to see how much damage had been done by both wind and fire. He supposed they might have to put a new roof on the kitchen. When Skip heard this he giggled and looked at Mr. Burton, who winked back at him, and then Skip flung the door wide open. Jim gave one

startled glance, blinked hard as though he could not believe what his eyes told his brain, and then took a little step forward and stood alone on the threshold. For several minutes after that he didn't say a word. His grandfather and his chum gazed at him in wonderment, but Jim seemed to forget they were there. He was looking with all his might across the rocky meadow, to and through the widespreading entrance of the ravine. Before he had gone to bed he could not have done this. He would have only seen the interior of the old familiar kitchen. Now, however, there was no kitchen, neither was the wood-shed there, nor the chicken-coops, the pigpen, nor the horse barn. The wind first, and then the fire had made havoc with the old gray buildings.

At last Jim turned and smiled down into his grandfather's face. "Isn't it perfectly fine?" he cried. "All that view! Say, grandpa, let's have this for the front door, won't you? Let's build a piazza out here. I can see almost up to the waterfall. If there was only enough water coming over, I bet we could see it sparkle through the trees now. Ain't this the greatest view ever?"

"Well, well, Jim, you are certainly the funniest boy I ever saw," laughed his grandfather. "Here I've been bothering more'n a good deal about your feeling bad over the loss of the extension, and this is the way you take it. Do you realize that about everything you owned — clothes, books and all — has gone up in smoke?"

"I never thought of that, grandpa, I only thought

of the view and the trees up in the glen. How fine it is to see them so near, isn't it? Never mind my clothes, it's warm weather now. You know how I love to go barefoot, and I guess I can earn a winter suit before the fall comes." Thus did the light-hearted boy dispose of the clothes question. "See," he continued, "there's the big chestnut that Skip and I want to build a house in. Do you s'pose we can do it, soon? How near it looks now, doesn't it? And if you lean forward this way a little bit, you can see the rocks where we were going to help the girls make a fort. We were going to send messages back and forth on a trolley line, from there to their wild rose island.

"Just you look at the ground, first, Jim," said the more practical Skip; "seems to me there's some work to be tended to, first, right at our feet. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I s'pose there is," answered Jim, glancing in rather a shamefaced way at the still smoking ruins which lay beneath them. "All this must be cleaned up, of course."

"It certainly must, Jim," laughed his grandfather, "if you want to have a piazza built here. I think that's a very good idea of yours, too."

"Then we can do it?"

"Yes, if you do not mind the hard work it will mean."

"Oh, that won't hurt us any," delightedly answered Jim. "Let's begin right away. Skip'll help, won't you, Skip? And, grandpa, won't it be

perfectly fine if we can get it all done by the time Sam and — my — father — come home?" Jim still stammered a little when he spoke of his father to Mr. Burton. He had for so long a time withheld his confidences, that it did not yet come easily to him to speak openly to his grandfather. Each time he did, however, made the next time easier.

"But what about the secret room, Jim?" said Mr. Burton. "Will you let that go?"

"Yes, for a few days longer, grandpa. You don't care, do you, Skip?"

"I don't care what happens," giggled Skip, "so long's I can be here and help in whatever you do."

"Well, then, boys, I have a suggestion to make," said Mr. Burton. "Suppose you wheel me around to the shade under the maple. I'm thankful the fire spared that at any rate; and while you look the ruins over, and decide where to begin to clear up, I'll take pencil and paper and figure out just what amount of lumber we'll need for the piazza, roof, steps and all. Then the first time any one goes to the village, it can be ordered, and Mr. Jones can begin with the stone piers as soon as you clear up enough space for him to dig the holes."

"All right," agreed Jim, "let's get right around there now." In a few moments the two boys were busily following out Mr. Burton's directions. He would glance up from his figuring occasionally and advise them how to proceed with their work, and by the time his calculations were finished,—the boys had measured off the distances for him that he

might compute the needed amount of material,—they had a very fair idea of how much work was before them, and the time it would take to clear away the necessary space for the required piazza. The rest of the cleaning up could be done more leisurely.

At last they threw themselves at the foot of Mr. Burton's chair to rest. "I tell you what," exclaimed Jim, "let's drag everything over to the cold cellar that was underneath the pantry, and dump all the timber, beams and everything that'll still burn in together, pour some kerosene in, light it and then, when it won't burn a bit more, fill up the hole with rocks and earth, and tamp it down hard. We won't need a cellar there any more."

"We might do that, I s'pose," replied Mr. Burton. "Yes, that's a sensible plan. Perhaps Mr. Lyford and some of the others will help. You must be very careful not to hurt your hands, you know, Jim. How are they this morning?"

"All right, grandpa. See!" And Jim held them up for inspection. "And I guess my head can get along without the bandage, too. Can't it? I forgot it was on. Take it off, Skip, will you?"

"Certainly, anything to oblige," gleefully answered Skip. "Your head, I s'pose you mean?"

"No, not this time," solemnly answered Jim, "just the bandage."

When it was removed, the red marks left by the fire were found to be no more serious than those on the hands. Mr. Burton realized again how much

he had to be thankful for, and as he glanced at his grandson, Skip, as though reading what was passing through the man's heart, said:

"Don't you worry about Jim, Mr. Burton. I'll see that he doesn't hurt his hands any. I'll do all the hauling and everything like that to-day. I'll take care of him."

"Wish you would, Skip; wish you would," answered Mr. Burton. "You'll have to keep a close watch on him, too, or there's no knowing what he'll do — climb a tree and forget to come down, maybe."

"Or keep on climbing and fall off," added Skip, laughing at his chum, who was leaning against his grandfather's knee and looking toward the ravine with eager eyes.

"I'm just crazy to get up there," he said in answer to Skip's friendly nudge, and paying no attention to his remark, "and into the secret room, too. My, we've got lots to do, but this work comes first, I s'pose; so, grandpa," turning around to Mr. Burton, "what'll we do next? What'll hurry us along the fastest?"

"Picks, shovels and rakes," was the laconic answer. "Skip, suppose you catch one of the horses and ride down to borrow what your father can lend us in the way of tools. Ours were burned. In the meantime Jim can wheel me back to the front piazza, I can write my orders to the carpenter better there, and I should think by to-night, if you can get some one to help with the heaviest work, we can

start your bonfire in the old cellar. Who would have thought we would be having another fire in this neighborhood so soon! Then to-morrow Mr. Jones can begin on the piers for the piazza, and you can have the day clear for the secret room."

"Goody! I hope so," cried Jim, "though I think this is good fun, all right; but that! Hurry up, Skip; go and get Judge. He's the fastest horse. You don't mind waiting a minute, do you, grandpa?" he added, "and I'll help Skip. Judge knows me better and I shouldn't wonder if it took both of us to catch him now. I guess he's having too good a time out there in the meadow to come without a chase."

"Say, Jim," asked Skip, as the two friends went up to the meadow bars together, "what in the world has come over your grandfather? He's just as nice as he can be. Why, he's like a different man."

"And he *is* a different man," answered Jim. "Just listen while I tell you what happened last night!" In a few graphic sentences, Jim related enough of his intimate talk with his grandfather to let Skip realize the happy changed relations between them, and Skip was as delighted as Jim knew he would be.

"I call that just bully of him," said Skip, when his friend had finished, "to tell you everything the way he did. It is awfully exciting about your father, of course, but even without that, having your grandfather so nice must make you feel first rate."

“Well, I just guess it does,” replied the other. “Now, come on, we mustn’t let Judge run by us this time.”

The morning passed so busily that before the boys realized it, noon arrived, and with it, the call to dinner. Afterward many friends and neighbors drove up — for news of the fire had spread — to sit awhile and talk over the exciting event. Strange as it was, the terrific wind and electric storm was purely local. It spent itself on Mr. Burton’s property alone. It did comparatively little harm elsewhere. Though the temperature fell a few degrees after it had passed, no rain had fallen in its wake, and the farmers and villagers condoled with one another, as well as with Mr. Burton, on the probable loss of crops, unless rain were to come soon. They also asked many interested and curious questions about the experimental work of Mr. Lyford, and were inclined to joke him a good deal. In return he good-naturedly asked them only to give him time, and to come back next year when they could all see the successful results of this summer’s work. Sam’s unexplained departure and Mr. Burton’s changed manner to one and all, were slyly commented on more than once before the visitors left. And Jim, made to tell his story over and over again, thought the time would never come when he would be free to join Skip in his fascinating work at the rear of the house. Finally, however, he politely held the last visitor’s horse while the owner got into the

buggy, took up the "slack" of the reins and started to drive away. Then Jim turned around and ran as fast as he could toward Skip who came equally as fast from the opposite direction, full of excitement.

"Oh, Jim," he cried, "the most wonderful thing! What do you think has happened? What *do* you suppose I've discovered?"

CHAPTER XIX

SKIP'S DISCOVERY

“**I** DON'T know; what? Oh, what is it?” cried Jim, hurrying on by the side of his friend.

Skip, without replying, scrambled over some still smoldering timbers and charred walls to a spot where, in the counterfeiter's day, the wood-shed used to be. Since that time it had been turned into part of the kitchen. Here he stopped and pointed to the ground. “Just look at that,” he said.

Jim glanced in the direction indicated and then cried out, “Oh, Skip, bully for you! You've —”

“Hush-sh-sh, somebody's coming,” whispered Skip. “Pretend you're only telling me what to do. Cricky, but I hope they don't stay!” But they did.

Mr. Lyford arrived first, pushing Mr. Burton in the wheel chair. Then came Mr. Jones, walking beside his friend, busily interested in talking over the project of the new piazza. Directly behind them were the girls, on their way to spend the afternoon in the glen. Last of all came the entire force of the camp, most of the men armed with pick, ax or rake, and all intent on helping the boys. Poor, impatient Jim and Skip! They could only look at

each other in anxious dismay and, while accepting the help so kindly offered, managed to keep the others away from the corner of the old kitchen which, so unexpectedly, had become of the utmost importance to them. In spite of their fears, however, nothing was discovered. And the boys had to acknowledge that without the help of Mr. Lyford and his men, the work would have soon become tiresome and extremely difficult. More than once a heavy timber had to be pried from the ground, or a bit of teetering wall gently knocked down. Pick-ax and crowbar had to be carefully wielded and the work was so interesting and exciting that the girls stayed to watch, and soon were very busy carrying to the old-new home the half-burned treasures and household effects the boys dug out of the ruins. At last four o'clock came. Mr. Jones, having decided that he could begin on the piazza piers next morning, went off to get his materials. Mr. Lyford and some of the campers also left that they might make ready the ground to receive a consignment of imported trees which were to arrive on the next train. The rest of the men drove down to the station to get them and took the girls. That left Mr. Burton and the boys alone. The former, leaning back in his chair, had quietly fallen asleep. Jim looked at him, with a smile, and then nodded to Skip. They carefully made their way to the spot about which they had been thinking all the afternoon, and were about to toss aside some half-burned panels of wood when Mr. Burton waked up and called to Jim.

The boy stifled an impatient exclamation and managed to answer good-naturedly, "Yes, grandpa?"

"If you'll take me to my room," the man answered, "I guess I can get a nap before supper. Out here these pesky flies bother me so I can't sleep a wink."

"All right!" And the boy obediently clambered back to the big maple.

"And if I were you," his grandfather continued, while Jim carefully wheeled him around to the front of the house and got Ellen to help him lift the chair up the steps, "I wouldn't work any more this afternoon. Take it easy now. Have the bonfire tonight and then do a little each day till things are all shipshape once more. You know you've got all the farm work to do now that Sam's away; that is, what there's left, since we've sold out, as you might say; and I'll have to get you to help me plan the new buildings for the live stock, too. You know we've got to get them under cover before cold weather comes."

"And, grandpa," answered Jim, "there's one thing we want to remember, and that is to put the buildings up so's they won't hide the view of the glen from the new piazza."

"That's right, my boy. We must manage somehow to be all front and no back, mustn't we? How do you s'pose we'll do that, eh? Well, we needn't worry 'bout that yet awhile, need we? Seems to me there's plenty other things that must be tended

to first. I told Mr. Lyford I guessed you couldn't work for him any more, now that so much had to be done right in our own dooryard. And you must go easy or you'll be all tuckered out before you know it."

"That's so, grandpa, I guess you're right, and I do feel kind o' tired, now, so I'll get Skip to go up in the ravine with me till supper time."

"You don't expect to catch any trout, do you, with the brook so low?" laughed his grandfather; "but it's cooler up there at any rate."

When Jim got back, Skip was as busy as could be and laughed at the idea of the ravine. "We've bigger fish than brook trout to catch to-day, haven't we?" he asked. "Just see here!"

The boys dropped to their feet in the cleared space Skip had made to peer at a hitherto unknown, narrow staircase which led downward from the floor of the old wood-shed. This flooring, which had been left undisturbed when the boards of the kitchen extension were laid down, had kept its secret all these years. What was it now to reveal to these two excited boys?

"Just to think," exclaimed Jim, as he helped Skip to enlarge the opening at the head of the newly discovered staircase, "that I've walked around and over this spot every day of my life and never knew what was beneath me."

"Well, you don't now," laughed Skip. "There! Everything's cleared away. Shall we go down?"

The stairs were very narrow and steep, moldy and half-rotted away. The boys hesitated about trying them. Several times they made an attempt and each time drew back. It seemed a dangerous thing to do. Were the stairs burned further down where they could not see? Where did they lead? What was below?

Jim trembled in his excitement. "Of course I'm going down," he finally cried; "we'll never find out anything here, just standing still and talking. Stop it, Skip! What are you doing? Take your hands off me," he cried, for his chum had laid hold of his coat with a strong, detaining grasp.

"You just don't go down there, that's all," he said. "I promised your grandfather I'd take care of you and so I will."

"Well, I like that," angrily answered Jim. "Any one'd think I was about six years old."

"Now don't get mad," placidly answered Skip. "Just think of your hands. You couldn't take a step down there without grabbing hold of something to steady yourself by and the skin would all come off."

"I s'pose it would," sighed Jim, ruefully gazing at his still scarred fingers. "Well, then, you go down, will you? And tell me where the stairs lead to."

"Cricky," cried Skip. "Well, here goes." And, carefully balancing himself with both hands against the dark and damp underground walls, he slowly,

step by step, descended the narrow and steep stairs to the mysterious depths below. Jim crouched above and waited.

Several minutes passed. Then Skip reappeared at the foot of the stairs and called:

"Come on down, Jim; it's all right, nothing 'cept a square hole in the ground."

"Must be more'n that," answered Jim, as he followed his friend, "or you wouldn't shout so. Do be quiet. D'you want to let every one know what we've discovered? And now, what is it, anyway?"

By this time he was standing on a rickety floor of moldy boards and, with his arm across Skip's shoulders, was peering into the dim corners of what appeared to be an old cellar. Perhaps ten feet square, it contained nothing except a few apparently empty barrels which stood in one corner.

"Oh, shucks," then disgustedly said Jim, "I don't see what you're so excited about. I s'pose the old counterfeiter stored his apples and potatoes here so as to have them near the house in cold weather. And if grandpa had only noticed things more when he built the extension, he'd have discovered the way down here."

"But look a' here!" The reason for Skip's excitement now showed itself. Reaching down in the depths of one of the big barrels, he lifted up a half-filled bag of sacking. He shook it a little. Something inside jingled. "Here," said Skip, handing the moldy, musty bag to Jim, "put your hand in and see what you get."

Jim silently followed the other's directions and then stepped to the little patch of light that filtered down from the opening above the stairs that he might the better see what he held. After a second of silent surprise he cried, "Money, money, Skip! Just see here," and frantically rubbing two of the coins together and then polishing them off with his flannel shirt, he knew that at last he had found what the United States detectives had failed to discover—the hiding place for the counterfeit money. "Oh, Skip!" he cried.

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed the other boy. "D'you s'pose 'tis? I thought so, too, but couldn't believe my eyes when I saw 'em. That's why I didn't let on when I called you. Oh, do you really s'pose 'tis?"

"Of course I do," tremblingly answered Jim, "and what's more, I bet you dollars to doughnuts old man Crooker was down here, or somewhere mighty near, that day the dep'ty sheriffs came, 'cause it's only a step from the top of these stairs to where the old cow shed used to be. I bet he was down here, counting over his money, and when he heard the pistols go off, he shied up there as quick as he could. And the wood pile must have been fixed so as to hide the stairs. And say, when the crazy counterfeiter tried to pry up the floor of the harness room the other day p'rhaps he thought it'd lead down here. He may have known about this place and got sort o' mixed up."

"Well," commented Skip, "that may all be, but

what I don't see is, why was the secret room, if there is one up on the third floor of the house, so far from this underground cellar? For if they made the money up there and stored it down here, they'd have to carry it through the house and —"

"No, they wouldn't! No, they wouldn't!" interrupted Jim. "I know now what they did! There's a secret passage as well as a secret room."

"Ah, go on," sneered Skip.

"Yes, there is," insisted Jim, "between that secret room and this cellar, and what's more, we've got to find it!"

The boy's assurance was so contagious that Skip in spite of himself exclaimed: "Jim, I bet you're right!"

"Right? Of course I'm right," confidently answered Jim. "But, my, ain't you kind o' trembly? I feel awfully wobbly in my legs. Let's sit down on the steps for a while and see what this money looks like."

The boys emptied the bag at their feet and as though by mutual consent began to polish the coins which they picked up at random from the little pile in front of them. For several minutes they kept hard at this work, which, fascinating at first, soon grew tiresome. At last they stopped and Jim said with a laugh:

"Here we are as hard at work as though our lives depended upon it, and the money's no good, anyway. Come on, let's leave it."

"Well, what'll we do next?" asked Skip. "For

it's beginning to get dark and what we do we'll have to do in a hurry."

"I'll tell you what," answered Jim; "let's go up and do the chores first and then after supper pretend we've got to hunt for something we left in the glen. Then we can come out here with a lantern. There's no use in our poking round in this dim light any longer. We couldn't find anything if we did."

"What do you expect to find, anyway?" said Skip as he preceded Jim up the steep and short flight of stairs to the pure, welcome air above. "You haven't seen anything down there in that smelly place that warrants your thinking you're going to find anything so awful great. I don't believe I take much stock in the idea of that secret passage, after all. I didn't see anything that looked like it, anyway."

"Well, if you never believe anything 'cept what you see, Skip," answered his chum, "I guess nothing much would happen in this world, that's one sure thing. Any one up there?"

"Nope; coast's clear, come on. No one's seen us. Well," laughed Skip, "I'm with you, no matter what crazy thing you do next. I'm ready to follow where you lead and I guess that's more'n most fellers'd do, all righty. 'Cause 'tain't so awful pleasant nosing around in that moldy place. So far's I can see there's just four walls, floor and ceiling, mostly wood—and rotten at that—and where it ain't wood it's earth hard as a rock and smooth as an ice pond, and the barrels in one

corner, with counterfeit money in 'em. Now, then, smarty, what do you see, more'n that?"

"Hum," Jim answered, stooping to dig some mold from his shoe with a charred bit of stick. "I see a tunnel beginning somewhere down there, and leading into the house and up —" here he stood erect and looked straight into Skip's expectant eyes — "up, up, between the walls to the secret room! That is what *I* see!"

"You do? Gee whizz, I bet you're right," said Skip, for the second time that afternoon, and Jim answered as he had the first time:

"Right? Of course I'm right. Come on, now, begin to clear away again for here are the girls, back from the station."

The boys, as they made a pretense of being busy, managed to continue their conversation unheard by Helen and Gertrude who stood in the open doorway at the end of the hall and watched them.

"Say, Jim," whispered Skip, "we can't do any more hunting to-night. We're going to have that bonfire."

"That's so, worse luck," Jim answered. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Well, how'll we manage?" asked his friend.

"We'll have to wait till to-morrow, I guess, for that pile of stuff must be cleared up so's your pa can begin on the piazza. I'm just bound to have things look decent when Sam and — and — my father come home."

"Say, Jim, seems to me you're too sure about —"

"No, I ain't either," interrupted Jim, as he stopped working and turned down his sleeves, "I am just as sure about that as I am about the tunnel to the secret room. I've got something to prove that, though, and I haven't about Sam and my father. But both will come true, you see if they won't. Seeing isn't always believing. Sometimes you *know* a thing's so and yet you can't *prove* it! And that's the way I know my father's coming home, but though I can't *prove that*, I can about the tunnel to the secret room."

"How can you? Now you're just talking through your hat, Jim."

"No, I ain't. Now, you listen."

"Go on; I'm listening."

"Well, remember that the walls in that corner of the house are so thick that the windows have inside and outside blinds to 'em?"

"Yep."

"Well, that tunnel that we've got to find, either leads from the hole we've just discovered or from the cellar under the house, to some kind of a way up, between the walls, to the secret room. There's space enough."

"Not for a fat feller like me," laughed Skip.

Helen, beckoning just then from the doorway, and calling, "Come to supper, boys, aren't you hungry?" stopped their planning for the time, and as they willingly obeyed the call, Skip patted Jim on the back.

"You certainly take the cake for thinking things

out," he said, "but I more'n half believe it's just as you say."

"But however can we find that tunnel?" then said Jim, and he shook his head in rather a dubious way. "First, there's the bonfire, then the men to dodge, and after we do get to work, there's —"

"Well, let's wash up and eat first," Skip, the practical, interrupted, "and by that time perhaps you'll have thought of just what to do."

CHAPTER XX

ON THE TRAIL

JIM stood first on one foot and then on the other and twisted the buttons on his flannel shirt till one flew off and bounded way across the room. He felt quite as miserable as he looked and that was saying a great deal; for, after successfully dodging Mr. and Mrs. Lyford ever since the storm, they had at last succeeded in compelling him to listen to their hearty thanks and admiration for his courageous action. The rest of the household had separated as usual after supper, and were busy about their respective tasks. Jim, still hungry, had lingered over his second doughnut and glass of milk. So the Lyfords, seeing their opportunity, had slipped back to the table, and Jim, though he hastily arose, could not, this time, avoid them.

"Oh, shucks," at last he stammered, "'twa'n't nothing. Don't take on so, Mis' Lyford. I'm glad to have obliged you, of course, but little Gertrude would have gotten along all right without me, I guess, if I hadn't been there."

"Oh, no, she wouldn't," her mother cried, "and —"

"But you were there," added her father, "and

we want to offer you — that is, we want to give you —”

“No, you don’t, you don’t give me one cent, Mr. Lyford,” angrily interrupted Jim, his thin face flushing from chin to brow; “I guess I can help a bit ’ithout being *paid* to be decent. I guess I’d be pretty small potatoes if I couldn’t.”

“But I don’t mean to pay you, Jim,” responded Mr. Lyford, and as his wife left them together he smiled in a friendly way while inwardly approving the lad’s high spirit. “What I was going to say was this, and though you may not have noticed it, it is true none the less, that when any one shows he is equal to an emergency there is always a need for that person in some capacity right away. And so Mrs. Lyford and I want to give you an opportunity of doing something more for Gertrude — if you’re willing, that is.”

“All right. What is it? I’m willing enough, I guess, so fire ahead,” Jim hastily answered, half ashamed of his unjust suspicions of a moment before.

“Well, then, how does this proposition strike you? Do you want to build a little shack up in the pines for her? She needs high, dry, mountain air and that which blows through the pine grove is so strengthening, her mother would like to have her try sleeping up there for the rest of the summer. And after you’ve built the shack, or hut, or whatever you call it, and they’ve moved up there, we’d like to engage you to drive them up and down every

night and morning. What do you think about it?"

"I think it's just a bully idea, Mr. Lyford, and of course I'll do it. Will Helen sleep up there, too?"

"If she wishes — and your shack is big enough."

"Oh, I can manage that part all right enough, I guess," eagerly answered Jim, "for there's more than enough rocks and old stumps up there now than I'd need to build a dozen houses with, let alone such a small thing as you want. And Mr. Jones can haul me a few extra planks when he gets the timber for the piazza."

"And we'll rent the land from you and hire your team and time, you know," continued Mr. Lyford; "that's understood."

The thought flashed through Jim's mind, "money to find my father with," so he at once agreed and went with the promoter of this delightful scheme in order to tell his grandfather all about it. Mr. Burton was very glad and much interested and Jim felt not a little proud of the fact that so soon after coming into possession of the pines he was to realize an income from them. He wanted to go right up and begin at once. And his grandfather and Mr. Lyford laughed at his enthusiasm.

"Sleep on it first," they said, "and before you do that there's the bonfire to attend to, you know."

"Oh, yes, of course," laughed Jim, "I didn't really mean to begin to-night," and as he happily wheeled his grandfather's chair to the back of the

house, it was quite hard to think calmly of the many and interesting things which, one after another, waited his time and attention. Above everything else in importance, however, was the finding of the secret room and Jim gave a little sigh of satisfaction as he thought that the quest would be ended in the morning. Such a thing as meeting with disappointment never entered his mind. He pictured to himself how the room would look; it was hard to wait until to-morrow's sunlight would allow him to continue the search; but in the meantime he willingly turned his attention to the bonfire; and this was a great success.

The entire Jones family came to it and each and all threw into the pit of fire everything left from the ruins which was still food for the hungry flames. The boys and the campers dragged the heavy timbers and half-burned furniture, window casements and doors to the edge of the old cellar and pushed them in. The greedy fire would greet them with a roar and a shower of sparks. Two busy hours were spent in this way. The men, helping here and there, when needed, kept a careful watch over everything and those who were not at work grouped together at a safe distance from the heat and flames and became greatly interested in the proceedings. More than once Mr. Jones and Mr. Lyford had to interfere when the campers, intent on their novel and needed task of destruction, would have fed the eager fire too rapidly. At last the flames died down to a subdued, glowing bed of coals from which no danger

could possibly threaten the old gray house. Jim and Skip, who had been unusually quiet, and had spent most of their time sitting on an overturned chest which covered the newly found staircase, at last much to their relief, noticed that the party was breaking up.

Mr. Jones and his family, because it was so late, decided to go right home and not wait for the crackers and milk and cake Mr. Burton offered to all. With many jokes and good-night wishes, every one moved slowly around to the front of the house. Jim wheeled his grandfather and as Skip was to spend the night with his chum the two boys helped the invalid prepare for the night together. Then they went into Jim's room and closed the door and Mr. Burton, listening in vain for their subdued laughter and usual bedtime frolic, thought that out of consideration for him, they had at once gone to bed. So he contentedly closed his eyes, and, thankful for the quiet, happily fell asleep.

It *was* quiet in Jim's room, for the boys were not there! As soon as they had closed the door behind them they had knelt down and taken off their shoes. Then, tiptoeing over the floor and tossing them out of the window, they deftly scrambled over the sill and noiselessly dropped to the ground beneath. It took but a few minutes to light the lantern which, just after supper, Skip had secreted for this purpose, and then they were at last embarked upon the hunt for the secret room. They had decided that they could not wait until the next day and that they

would not allow anything to keep them from carrying out their determination. So that is why they did not join the family in the late supper party in the pantry, nor pay any attention to the gay laughter which floated out to them from the open windows and door. They forgot, perhaps for the first time in their lives, how good bread and milk tastes when eaten late at night after any kind of a good time. And as the others thought that they were as they professed to be, unusually tired, and had gone to bed, their absence was thus explained.

At first, the small, damp cellar promised no solution to their quest. "Where does the tunnel come in, or go out?" whispered Skip. He sat down on the lowest step of the stairs to put on his shoes. "You'd better do the same, Jim," he said, "because there's no knowing what we may step on."

"All right," answered Jim. He placed the lantern carefully on the floor while he followed his friend's example. Then, the last knot tied, he straightened up and looked around him before he picked up the lantern to continue the search for the tunnel which, he still assured Skip, he knew they would find. Quite naturally he glanced at the little ribbon of soft, yellow light that reached out from the lantern to the cluster of barrels in one corner. The damp earth floor showed level and monotonous up to a certain point, but at that point, quite close to the largest barrel, was there not something that looked different? A slight roughness in the ground? Jim dashed over to the spot and rolled

the barrel aside. Skip caught up the lantern and in two bounds was at his side. And there, half hidden by the other barrels, which stood on a trap-door of iron-clamped timbers, yawned the black entrance to a narrow passageway. All the barrels had to be moved before the boys could gain admittance, but in less time than it takes to tell it, they were carefully treading their way, in single file, down a contracted, stone-walled ditch which led in the direction of the house. Jim went first and carried the lantern. Skip, his hand on the other's shoulder, followed close behind. Neither spoke. They had to bend their heads a little to escape hitting the roof of the tunnel which, made of rough hewn planks, looked as though it might fall down if merely touched. Jim's breath came in short, quick gasps and Skip was no less excited. Finally the former hesitated, then stopped and whispered:

"Say, Skip, have you noticed that we ain't coming down any more? We've taken five steps on a level now."

"Yep, I've counted 'em, too," murmured Skip. "I s'pose we're under the cellar, don't you?"

"Yes, and don't you feel fresh air, too?"

Skip took a long, deep breath, and then said, "Of course, I do. It's blowing on our faces, too. Now you go slow, Jim. No knowin' what you'll step on to. Maybe a bottomless pit's right in front of us."

"No danger of that," softly answered Jim, "'cause the lantern lights up the tunnel for three

or four feet in front of me and it's all right. But I certainly do feel a difference in the air. It's been so close and musty before, but now —"

"Look up," interrupted his chum.

Jim did so and saw that they were standing beneath a point in the wooden ceiling, which, more decayed than the rest, showed several gaping holes which framed spots of intense blackness. While Jim still held the lantern aloft, Skip wrenched off a bit of the planking and enlarged the openings into one. Then bracing it against the stone side of the tunnel, he managed, with Jim's help, to boost himself up far enough to thrust his head and shoulders through the hole. In a second he dropped back beside his friend.

"We're right under the cellar," he whispered. "And the door at the head of the stairs is open and I heard Ellen laugh. She and Mis' Lyford must be washing up the dishes."

"D'you ever!" answered Jim. "I s'pose this is where Blackie caught the mice the day we opened the house. I guess she caught all there were."

"I'm sure I hope she did," answered Skip. "It would be rather close quarters to meet one now, wouldn't it?"

"You bet it would. Well, come on. I don't feel so trembly as I did. Do you? Want to finish?"

"Well, I guess," replied Skip. They proceeded as before. Half a dozen steps, taken with more confidence, now that they realized how near they were to the everyday things of life, brought them

to the end of the tunnel. The damp, rough walls of the house's foundation loomed up before them. And, clamped and riveted firmly into the stone and mortar, were to be seen the lowest rungs of an iron ladder which led up into the blackness above them!

"There—you see! Didn't I tell you so?" exclaimed Jim.

Skip's only answer was "Cricky!" He could not add another word, but none was needed, nor, indeed, would it have been heard. Jim, the lantern on his arm, was already far above him, cautiously feeling his way from one rung to another as he made rapid progress into the unknown mysteries at the end of the rusty ladder.

Skip, drawing a deep breath, followed him, and in a few moments caught at Jim's foot, which was thrust back in order to take another step upward. The heavy heel struck him in the forehead and, blinded for a moment with the pain, he closed his eyes and almost lost his balance. Jim, realizing what he had done, uttered an exclamation of pity and, reaching down, helped to draw the other up next to him. It was very close quarters but they managed to keep a firm hold on the ladder, and Jim's arm was affectionately thrown around his friend's shoulders.

"Feel better?" he asked.

"Yep, I'm all right now," whispered Skip. "S-sh, listen; put the lantern behind us," he quickly added, but in so low a voice that Jim had to bend his head to hear.

When the light was shielded the boys pressed their faces against the wall nearest the house and could not only detect a low murmur of conversation which came to them from the other side of the paneling, but could also see a thin thread of light which found its way through the various minute cracks in the dry and seasoned woodwork. The boys were so pleased they had all they could do to keep from laughing out loud. They could tell, from the voices, that they were opposite the room above Mr. Burton's — the apartment which Mr. and Mrs. Lyford had chosen. Still farther above this was — must be — the secret room!

"Only a few more steps now," said Jim, and he again began to climb. "All right, Skip?"

His chum nodded yes, and this time kept so close to Jim that the light of the lantern enveloped them both and he was in no danger of again being hit in the head by an excited boy's shoe. So up they went, unafraid, but so excited over their great adventure that nervous chills thrilled them from head to foot. Ten — nine — eight steps more to the top. But Jim did not know that so he stopped to rest. Then on again. Six — five — four! Skip sneezed at this point; sneezed so unexpectedly, so loud and so long that he could not smother the noise, and Jim began to scold. Then they both leaned against each other and shook with suppressed laughter. For they could hear faintly, though very distinctly, Mr. Lyford say:

“There, Gertrude’s sneezing again. Will you go in and cover her up, mother?”

A slight, swishing sound indicated that some one was moving to the next room. Jim pointed to a very small hole in the wall, through which these sounds had come. It was so high up and so small that the occupants of the room would not notice it, but just at present it was on the level with the boys’ eyes. “I s’pose the old counterfeiter made it on purpose,” giggled Skip, “so’s he could hear ’ithout being seen.”

Again they mounted. Three — two — one — no more. Jim’s groping hand, extended above his head, came in contact with a trapdoor which yielded to his pressure, and, being raised up against the wall, clicked against a spring and was thus held open. Jim shoved the lantern as far as his arm could reach on a dusty floor he could but dimly see. He turned around and sat on the edge of the opening; then he lent a helping hand to Skip and in another breathless second the boys realized that their quest was ended. Was it really possible that they had at last found the secret room?

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

“**I** DON'T believe it,” gasped Skip, out of breath owing to his difficult climb up the steep and rusty ladder. “It's too good to be true. I bet we're dreaming, Jim. Just you give me a good, hard pinch to wake me up.”

“S-sh!” cautioned Jim. “Remember the Lyfords are in the room below.”

“I'll be careful,” obediently answered Skip, lowering his voice till Jim could barely make out the following words, “but how's a feller to be quiet, no matter how hard he tries, when he's just made \$250?”

Jim laughed. “That's so,” he said. “That's your part, all right, Skip; and you've certainly earned it. I guess your climb up the ladder wasn't all a joke, was it? Particularly when I kicked you in the head!”

“I was only fooling, Jim, when I said that,” protested Skip. “You don't really think I meant it, do you?”

“If you meant it or if you didn't, I did; so what's the difference?”

“A great deal of difference to you,” retorted

Skip, good-naturedly, "for I don't touch a cent of that reward."

"Why not, I'd like to know?"

"Because you found—"

"I never found one thing alone, Skip, and you know it."

"You did, too. Who measured the hall, and who thought about the extra thick walls, and who discovered that the end window wasn't open when I knew I had been in every room on this floor?"

"Why, I did, of course."

"Well, then, you needn't tell me—"

"But," triumphantly interrupted Jim, "who found the steps to the secret cellar? *You* did, Skip, you goose, and if you hadn't we wouldn't be here now, would we?"

"Yes, we would, all right, for it just happened that way. I stumbled over something and *found* the steps. I didn't *think* any of it out as you did. I never in the world would have thought of that tunnel and this ladder and you know it, Jim. No, siree, not one cent of the \$500 do I take. 'Tain't right I should."

"And who's the best judge of that, I should like to know?"

"Well, I am, for one, but any one'd tell you the same thing."

"Well, then," Jim answered, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, "just climb down the ladder again, will you?"

"Wh-why, Jim, what do you mean?"

"If you ain't going to take any of that reward, why you don't do any more hunting for it, that's all."

"Why, Jim Burton, you wouldn't be so mean!"

"'Tain't being mean, Skip. It's just being as sensible as you are 'bout it. Don't you think so?"

"No, I don't. And, cricky! I don't go one step down that ladder again, without you, either."

"Will you go halves on the reward, then?"

Skip hesitated for some moments and then replied, "I don't see what else I can do, 'cept fight, and I don't like to do that, if I want to keep on with you."

"And I guess you do want to, don't you?"

"You know I do."

"Well, then, if that money does come from the president, will you take half of it?"

"Why, I s'pose I'll have to."

"That ain't any kind of an answer, Skip. Say yes or no."

"Well, then, yes."

"Honor bright?"

"Certain sure, Jim."

"All right, it's a go, then. Now come on, what'll we do first? I'm just crazy to see what's in here," whispered Jim, as he drew himself together and stood upright in the little room. "Hope the floor's too thick for the Lyfords' to hear us. I guess we'd better open the window, if it doesn't make too much noise, for it's so awful close and musty up here. And then we can't see much with just this lantern

and there ought to be a moon. It's a little bit of a place, isn't it?"

He swung the lantern to and fro above his head and peered into the corners that seemed to hold all sorts of uncanny secrets in their shadowy recesses. The ladder ended in a niche next to the window. In the center of the left-hand wall was the open fireplace to which Jim tiptoed and carefully placed the lantern on the stone hearth. He looked up through the flue and saw two or three stars but no moonlight. Then, stepping back to the window, he helped Skip unbar and open the shutters. They did not squeak when pushed back and the window, also, opened easily. The boys gave a sigh of relief. But they congratulated themselves too soon. It was not after all to be so easy as they thought; the outside shutters refused to budge! They pushed and shoved and pushed. All to no purpose — they could not open the tightly closed wooden shutters. At last they stopped trying and looked at each other in dismay.

"We'll have to wait till morning," whispered Skip.

"But we won't be any better off even then," murmured Jim in reply, "for all the light we'll have will come down the chimney, and that won't be enough. I don't care if we do wake up the Lyfords," he added impatiently, "I'm going to open these plaguey things now! Where's something to hammer them with?"

"Oh, Jim, you dassent!"

"Yes, I dare, too. Come on; you look, too, Skip."

Jim turned from the obstinate shutters and groped around in the contracted space before him, hoping to find a hammer or some blunt instrument with which to pound them open. Skip picked up the lantern and by its light they saw the meager and businesslike furnishings of the little room. Opposite the window were the machines and crucible used for the last time, no doubt, to help mold, stamp and cut out the coin, which, for many years, had lain in the bags on the floor facing the fireplace. A small table and two chairs stood in the center of the room. On the wall over the ladder hung a clock. Between it and the angle toward the fireplace had formerly stood a heavy piece of furniture. What purpose it had served the boys did not at first know, for it no longer stood upright but rested face downward on the uneven pine floor. Spiders had spun webs from its sharp corners to the wall and ceiling. The lantern's rays turned the thin threads to silver and one or two hairy spiders were discovered, lifeless and heavy, imprisoned in the meshes of their own weaving. The boys held the lantern lower and then saw that which caused them to almost cry out in fear and make a leap for the ladder.

Skip started first. He dropped the lantern, which rolled over and over till it rested against the andirons in the fireplace and with a sudden flare went out, and in his terror, miscalculated the distance and, had it not been for Jim, would have fallen head first

through the open space between the walls. Jim, however, reached out just in time and pushed his chum with such force that both jumped clear of the danger and threw themselves heavily against the wall which made at that place a right angle to the front of the house. And then something so wonderful, so unexpected, happened that they forgot they were so frightened they could feel their hearts beat way up in their mouths.

The force of their impact against the wall loosened an unknown and unseen spring in the baseboard. The narrow section of wall immediately behind them slowly and noiselessly swung outward and they stumbled against its yielding surface, into one of the closets which opened into the carpenter's shop.

The two boys sank down on the floor and looked at each other with blanched faces. In the dark they could just discern each other's eyes, big and round with fear and astonishment. It was hard to say which of the two emotions they felt the most. At last Jim gasped:

"Did you see it?"

Skip nodded. He could not speak. He opened his lips but his tongue was so dry against the roof of his mouth he could not say a word.

"It was a — a — skeleton," stammered Jim, who was still shaking from the effects of their awful discovery.

"Yes," Skip finally managed to answer. "It was the lost — lost — counterfeiter."

"Of course, that's just who it is — or was," hysterically answered Jim. "And Skip! Skip! The whole \$1,000 will be ours. \$500 apiece! Just think of that!"

"Gee! Cricky! D'you ever?" laughed the other in a low, nervous whisper, who, now that he realized their normal surroundings, felt his confidence returning and with it, his power of speech.

The closet door, fortunately, stood open and from the window, not far away, the clear moonbeams came to them where they still crouched on the dusty floor, and gave light enough to enable them to get up and move around without being afraid of knocking into anything and making a noise. They carefully crept out into the room and sat down close together on the carpenter's bench. Each was glad of the other's companionship and for some moments they just sat there and quietly talked over in whispers, the almost miraculous manner in which they had found the way into the secret room. What they had seen in there they seemed to feel they could not talk about. At least, they did not at first mention it.

"It's funny we didn't see the joints or hinges or anything the other day when we were up here," said Skip. "I thought we looked as carefully as ever we could over every inch of the walls."

"So did I," commented Jim, "but I guess we didn't, did we? And so this is the way they came and went generally, I s'pose, and used the ladder to

take the money up and down on when it was finished or when they needed new metal."

"Yes, I guess that's what they did, for they couldn't be too particular, could they? 'Specially when they had boarders. Weren't they awfully cute fellers, though? Cricky, but ain't you crazy to tell the folks? Don't you wish morning'd come?"

"Yep. But say, will you go in there again?"

"What, now, in the dark? The moon's going down, too."

"Well, here's the candle, and some matches we left the first time we came up. We can cut the candle in two, it's big enough. For the oil spilled out when the lantern rolled over, so that's of no use any more."

"Ain't you afraid?"

"Are you?"

"I don't *believe* I am, but I feel kind o' funny."

"Well, you know he's been there more'n forty years. Yes, more'n fifty, I guess."

"And up here all this time! Phew!"

"But *we* didn't know it."

"No, and then you know, *he* hasn't been here at all."

"Well, come on."

"You go first."

"Well, you cut the candle in two, then."

"All right! Hand it over. Now then, here's one for each of us, and I only hope they'll last as

long as we'll want 'em. I wonder what time 'tis, anyway?"

"Don't know, but it must be after midnight 'cause the moon's going down. Say, it'll be awful dark up here then."

"Well, then, let's hurry."

"All right, you go first."

"No, you."

"You afraid?"

"No, but —"

"All right; you needn't come a'tall if you're *afraid*."

"Well, I guess I ain't any more afraid than you be."

"Come on, then, and show me you ain't."

By this time the two short pieces of candle were lighted and held in trembling hands. The boys crowded against each other at the narrow opening in the rear of the closet, but it was Jim, after all, who entered the secret room first. Then his courage was not so great but what he was perfectly willing to let Skip join him before he lightly stepped across the narrow space to the heavy piece of furniture which, half concealing, half revealing, that which it had so long ago taken captive, lay before them. And now, fully prepared for the sight of the awe-inspiring relic of death, they did not turn and run as they had before. Instead they, very carefully and slowly, examined everything they saw, and though they did not move nor change the posi-

tion of anything, that which was spread out before them told its own story.

Skip soon formed his own opinion but did not speak. From time to time he looked at Jim's alert and expressive face, and once or twice when their eyes met and exchanged a glance full of agreed understanding, he felt that they both had discovered the real reason why this lost and long-advertised counterfeiter had not escaped with the others. In a few minutes their natural curiosity was satisfied. They turned away from the silent and dread climax of their midnight adventure. Skip picked up the lantern from the fireplace, Jim gently let down the trapdoor over the ladder and they went back to the carpenter's shop.

The moon had now disappeared. In the chill and weird hour just before the coming of dawn, the boys felt cold, uncomfortable and very tired. They wedged the secret panel open and then protected their discovery by shutting and locking the closet door. No one, to their knowledge, had told the campers of their search for the secret room. Mr. Burton alone knew of their discoveries up to the present night; but they now thought they could not be too careful, so did not feel perfectly safe till the closet key was deep in Jim's trousers pocket. Then they cuddled down together, their backs to the wall, and wrapped themselves up in an old shawl, taken from the closet.

The candles sputtered and almost went out. The

boys cautiously shielded themselves from the penetrating east wind which drifted in through the open window. And first Jim, and then Skip, shivered.

"Now this is how it happened," began Jim.

"Bet I know just what you're going to say," interrupted Skip.

"Well, then, maybe *you'd* better do the talking," said Jim, in a cross kind of way.

"No, you go on, I'll be quiet," said Skip, with a sneeze. "That is, as quiet as I can," and he sneezed again.

"Hope you haven't taken cold, Skip," questioned Jim, anxiously.

"Nope, I'm all right," replied the other. "Well, what d'you think about it, anyway?"

"Just this," resumed Jim, "I bet the old codger," and he nodded his head in the direction from which they had just come, "was working up here with his pal when they heard the danger signal—the five shots—you know. He started with the other feller to go down the ladder and then thought he'd take what money he could away with him. They must have stored it in that old sec'tary."

"That's just exactly what I think," excitedly agreed Skip. "Oh, do go on, Jim."

"Well, he pulled out the drawers of the sec'tary and filled most of his pockets and then one drawer stuck, and he was in such a hurry and pulled so sharp and so hard that he pulled the whole thing over on top of him. The other feller had gone, you know,

and he was there all alone and so he died. What do you think, Skip?"

"What do I think, Jim? I think that that's exactly how it happened. It's as plain as the nose on your face."

"I think so, too," sleepily murmured Jim. "I only hope he was killed right off."

"Oh, he must have been," replied Skip. "For the heavy cornice struck him right across the eyes. Didn't you see?"

"Yes, but don't let's talk about it. It's so awful to think about now, so many years after it's happened, that it just makes me sick to think what it must have been then."

"Well," persisted Skip, in a reassuring way, "no need to feel that way about it as I can see, for, if, as we both think, he was killed right off, he didn't have time to feel anything, anyway. Don't you think so?"

"I s'pose so," answered Jim, stifling a yawn. "Say, Skip, let's go to bed. I'm awful sleepy."

"All right. My, ain't you glad we don't have to go back down that ladder?"

"Um-m. Well, come on! There! It's striking three. No 'tain't! Why, it's four o'clock. Say, Skip, do you know we've been up all night?"

"My, who'd have thought it?" replied Skip, as he silently followed Jim out to the hall. "I hope the stairs don't creak. I wouldn't wake any of the folks up now for a farm. I want to have the

fun of telling them all together to-morrow, don't you? "

Jim nodded without replying. He blew out his candle and silently slid down the balusters. Skip did the same and they were both so sleepy they were scarcely able to keep awake long enough to reach their bed. Each threw himself, full length, on the outside of the clean counterpane. Even the fact that they had just passed the most eventful night of their lives, and that in a few hours they would have the joyful experience of telling their adventures to the entire household, could not keep them awake. And so the old world rolled another day into the past and a new one full of life and action into the present, and in spite of the important place which had been reserved in it for the boys, they still slept. Who could blame them?

CHAPTER XXII

AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

“**F**OR the land’s sake, boys, wake up! Where under the sun have you been to get in such a mess? Why, you ain’t even undressed, either! And look at the dirt your shoes have tracked in to say nothing of the counterpane! Come, wake up! Breakfast’s ready and here you two lazy things are still snoozing! Your grandfather needs you to wheel him to the table, Jim, so do get a hustle on; you know how he hates to be kept waiting; and as for you, Skip, you lazy sinner, you belong to me, and if you don’t get up and out’n this in mighty quick time, I’ll take you over my knee and wallop you good!”

It would be hard to tell whether Mr. Jones was more amused or provoked at the difficulty he had in waking the boys, but not until he stopped talking, where he stood by the door of their room, and advanced to the bedside did he succeed in making any impression on their extreme drowsiness. Even then they only murmured a sleepy, “all right,” and rolled over, as though to find a more comfortable position that they might prolong their rest. Such, however, was not Mr. Jones’ intention. When further words and a gentle shake or two failed to produce any satisfactory result, he resorted to harsher methods

in the shape of cold water plentifully sprinkled over their dirty faces and tightly closed eyes. That worked quite as well as could be expected. With muttered threats of, "I'll get even with you, just wait," and "stop that, you mean thing," the boys resigned themselves to their fate and sat up, rubbing the sleep from their eyes.

"I thought you were Ellen," said Skip.

"Yes," laughingly replied his father, "I hardly thought your affectionate remarks were addressed to your dad."

"Oh, Mr. Jones!" exclaimed Jim, "we've got such news to tell you!"

"Won't it keep till you've reached the table?" asked the man, "for your breakfast's getting cold and I shouldn't wonder if we'd all like to hear."

"You'll have the greatest surprise of your life, pa," Skip laughed as he vigorously splashed his face and hands at the washstand and then as vigorously wielded a whisk-broom over his rumpled clothes. "You haven't any idea, have you, what we've —"

"Ah, now, don't, Skip," Jim interrupted, "wait til we're all together."

"All right, but gee whizz, I'm just crazy to tell some one. What d'you come 'round so early for, pa?"

"To begin on the piazza, son. Look out the window and you'll see the lumber — just hauled it up. Plenty of work ahead of you two youngsters for the rest of the summer, I guess. Now, you all ready? Come on, then, let's get to breakfast."

Jim ran into his grandfather's room and wheeled him to the table where the assembled household were still engaged over their morning coffee and hot bread. The boys managed to choke down a few mouthfuls but were too excited to really eat any kind of a meal. Mrs. Lyford looked anxiously at them once or twice and hoped they were not going to be ill — their eyes were so bright and their faces were so flushed.

"Oh, don't you worry any, please, Mrs. Lyford," said Jim, in a reassuring way, "for there's nothing the matter with us, 'cept we're just bursting with a story we want to tell."

"Well then," she laughed, "let's have it, now that we're all here, before we leave the table, for we certainly wouldn't want anything like that to happen."

"No'm," soberly answered Skip; "I kinder guess we'd muss things all up, wouldn't we? Now then," he continued, turning to his chum and unmindful of the laughter which half drowned his last remark, "you begin, Jim."

Jim looked at Mr. Burton and laid his hand on the old man's shoulder. "No, *you* begin, grandpa," he said, "for you are in this, too."

"Me?" questioned his grandfather.

"Yes; tell the story of this house up to the time, you know —" he whispered a few words in the old man's ear — "Then we'll finish."

"Wh-what!" gasped Mr. Burton, in such genuine astonishment every one knew that something

quite out of the ordinary was about to be told them.

"You don't mean to say, Jim, that you've —"

Jim softly placed his hand across his grandfather's lips. "Yep," he laughed, "we have; but won't you tell your part of the story first? That'll lead up to our part and then we'll finish."

Mr. Burton exchanged a surprised glance with Mr. Jones. He was visibly agitated. In a second, however, he had regained his self-possession. "What Jim wants me to tell," he said, "is how this old house was built; and though many of you may have listened to various yarns concerning it, its builder and the part I played in its building, down to the store, I guess what I'll tell you now'll be the only true and sensible story after all; it certainly is strange how a simple yarn can change in the telling of it, to the most monstrous fairy tale you ever heard of."

"That's so," chuckled Skip, and Jim added, "I wish Sam was here."

"So do I, so do I," assented his grandfather, and then he began his story.

The room, full of absorbed and expectant listeners, was breathlessly quiet till he had reached the time of his son's departure from home and finished what he called his "part of the story." Then Jim, urged by a nod from his grandfather, took up the narrative and, beginning with the episode of the tame crow, brought the story down to the day Skip and he first went upstairs and discovered the carpenter's shop. He stopped at this

point and cleared his throat. He was quite hoarse but anxious to continue because he saw how interested his audience was, and their undivided attention made him feel he couldn't talk fast enough. The most exciting part, of course, was yet to come, and Helen and Gertrude sat on the edge of their chairs, their bright eyes riveted on his face. He enjoyed their excitement. Then he looked at Skip and realized that his chum, always generous and thoughtless of self, had as much to do with the rest of the story as he had. Yet he sat quietly there, between the girls, and looked as interested and excited as though he did not know what was coming next. For one perplexing moment Jim hesitated. The others waited patiently. They thought he was still resting his voice. He wasn't, however; he was trying to make up his mind to let Skip continue. It was very hard to do this and at first it seemed that he couldn't stop—that he must finish the story himself. Then he shrugged his shoulders, drew a long breath, and said:

“There, that's all my part. Skip must tell the rest.”

“Me? Why, I can't; I can't, Jim. You go on,” stuttered Skip, growing suddenly quite red with pleasure and embarrassment. He *did* want to finish the story, for now was to come the most wonderful, the most exciting part of all. Yet could he tell it as it should be told? No, he couldn't. Jim must do it. But Jim was not to be persuaded; so, when Skip realized that, he plunged right in, and, if the

listeners had been interested before, they were spell-bound now.

Skip never hesitated nor left out a thing. He showed the black and blue mark on his forehead where Jim's boot heel had struck him, handed round one of the counterfeit coins he had kept from the bag that was in the barrel, and finally held up to view the candle end he had thrust in his pocket five hours before. Then he drew his hand across his hot forehead, and, for he had risen to his feet while talking, dropped back in his chair, quite pleased and satisfied with the effect made by his description of their exciting midnight adventure.

The moment of breathless astonishment which followed was broken by Ellen who exclaimed:

"Well, there! I never did! You sure you didn't dream all this, boys?"

"Not a dream," laughed Jim. "It's as exciting as finding the crazy counterfeiter, isn't it?" He looked up into his grandfather's face. "Ain't you surprised, grandpa?"

"Surprised ain't the word, my boy," replied Mr. Burton. "I don't know *what* to say. To think that after all these years he — Job Greenough — should be upstairs — and to think that I can't get up there —"

"Oh, but you must," interrupted Mrs. Lyford. "Can't he be carried up, father? Can't you manage some way?"

"I don't see why not," answered her husband, thoughtfully. "For certainly you ought to be the

first to see to things up there, Mr. Burton. I don't want to go up there without you."

"Nor I," agreed Mr. Jones; "and yet I just got to get up there, Burton. 'Tain't in human nature to wait a minute longer than we have to," he laughed. "I tell you what, Burton, old man, we can easily carry you up; the way you and I used to take our wives across the road in muddy weather. You haven't forgotten those days when we used to make a chair by crossing our hands, have you, and the girls would slip their arms around our necks and squeal, they were so afraid we'd drop 'em?"

"And didn't you — ever?" mischievously asked Helen.

"Ah, that's telling," laughed Mr. Jones. "Did we, Burton?"

"Well, I won't give *you* 'way, 'tany' rate," chuckled his friend. His eyes sparkled with excitement at the prospect of being carried upstairs and the unusual sight which awaited him there. For, without a second's hesitation he said he was willing "to be toted like a bag of meal, if he couldn't get there any other way."

Amid much excitement and laughter every one left the table and hurried out into the hall. There, Mr. Lyford, looking around over his little company, at once decided that there were too many to go upstairs at the same time. Consequently they good-naturedly divided into two groups, each, of course, to be personally conducted by Jim and Skip. The college boys then went out to their farming and tree

cultivation, and the others hastened up to the secret room, now secret no longer.

The heroes of the day ran ahead, closely followed by Gertrude and Helen. Mrs. Lyford and Ellen were not far behind, and when they reached the carpenter's shop a few moments only elapsed before Mr. Lyford and Mr. Jones, gently carrying Mr. Burton between them, slowly entered the room. They carefully sat their burden down and while they rested the boys unlocked the closet door. They showed the girls many of the old treasures they had discovered and hovered nervously around, like birds about to fly away.

"Is there a chair in there for me?" queried his grandfather of Jim, and when the lad said yes, the man turned to his old friend. "I'm ready now, Jonesy," he whispered, and his lip quivered a little. His neighbor, declining Mr. Lyford's silently offered aid, easily picked the invalid up in his arms and passed through the two doors of the closet into the secret room.

The others, held by a common impulse, waited in silence. Even little Gertrude, young as she was, seemed to understand that it must be hard for the venerable owner of the old stone house to come face to face so unexpectedly with such unhappy memories of the past. So she stood quietly by her mother's side till they heard a call from the other room and when, one by one, they all moved through the narrow aperture, she was still more impressed by the unusual sight which confronted her. The

mysterious machinery, the trapdoor, now open and down whose black depths she fearfully glanced, the fallen piece of furniture, and the still, shrouded something concealed beneath it, stamped a picture on her mind which she never forgot. She was not afraid. The presence of her mother and father reassured her, and the time-faded linen sheet, which Mr. Jones had caught from the closet shelf, completely hid the mortal remains of the lost counterfeiter. Yet she was glad her mother held her hand.

“The boys were right,” said Mr. Burton. “Poor, old, deluded Job! Stopped to fill his pockets with the counterfeit gold and was too hasty! He always had a fiery temper. I remember how mad he used to get if things did not go his way at once. He always lit out on somebody; and this time he jerked too hard on those drawers that held the stored-up coin and they got back at him. And there he is! No, not there! But — well, now we know what became of him! Won’t the crazy counterfeiter be surprised when he hears about it! I s’pose he’ll be crazier’n ever! Well, well, what a lesson this is to you, boys, and girls — and to all of us! Though here’s hoping we don’t need any such lesson! But honesty pays; that, and that, only, all the days of our life! Well, now I guess we’d better get back into more cheerful surroundings, hadn’t we? I’d like to see my sunny corner on the front piazza more than ever just at present, and I presume the boys wouldn’t mind acting as an

escort to the rest of the folks. Ain't that so, boys?"

They smilingly assured him that it was and that it was their intention to come up the ladder again. Mr. Lyford laughingly said that he was glad he didn't have to come that way and when Ellen remembered, with a start, that the breakfast table still remained uncleared and started on a run for the dining room, the others soon followed, though not in so great a hurry.

Very little work was done by the inmates of the big stone house that day. Those who had not already been to the secret room, spent the rest of the morning toiling up the ladder to the little cubby hole, for it was scarcely more than that, and afterward, as they sat grouped about Mr. Burton's chair on the porch, in talking over the wonderful way in which the secret had been discovered. All through the dinner hour the same subject was under discussion and it was not brought to a close till Mr. Lyford set the good example of once more returning to work. His followers joined him. And then Mr. Burton said, as the boys were about to help Skip's father on the new piazza:

"Hold on a minute, youngsters, who's going to write to Washington?"

"Write to Washington? Why, I never thought about that!" exclaimed Jim.

"Well, I guess you'd better," laughed Skip, "or if you don't, some one else may claim the reward."

"There's no danger of that," Mr. Burton re-

plied, "but the President ought to be told about the secret room, don't you think so? And it seems to me that you boys are the ones to do it — to write that letter."

"Who, me? What — write a letter to the President of the United States?" asked Jim.

"Why, I've never done such a thing in my whole life!" stammered Skip.

"Well, I don't s'pose you have," responded Mr. Burton, laughing heartily at their amazement. "I haven't either, but I'm going to — this afternoon. Jim, you get the paper, ink and pens and move the little hall table out under the maples where it's nice and shady. We'll write our letters there and when they're finished you can drive down to the post-office and send 'em off."

"But I don't know how to address him, or anything," demurred Skip.

"Oh, come on, 'fraid cat," said Jim, who was already full of enthusiasm over the novel suggestion of sending a letter to the most honored man in the United States. "Just tell him in the politest way you can, everything you know and did about it. That'll be all right, won't it, grandpa?"

"It certainly will, my boy, and now let's get to work."

They wrote their letters not far from Mr. Jones, who was working busily on the new piazza, and what charred timbers the fire had spared. Almost at their feet was the entrance to the counterfeiter's cellar. Perhaps all these unusual objects in the

generally quiet and orderly dooryard helped to inspire the boys. Perhaps the memory of their last night's adventure alone, was all they needed to give them courage to write their letters. Whatever inspired them, however, still stayed to spur them on long after Mr. Burton had finished and addressed his communication to Washington. So he leaned back in his chair and patiently waited till the chums, often giggling and comparing notes, had also finished their letters. Each one read his aloud and when it had received the approval of both listeners was stamped and sealed in its envelope. Then the boys caught and harnessed Judge and drove down to the post-office to send off their important news.

While waiting for the afternoon mail, which was then just arrived, to be distributed, they had great fun in telling their story all over again. The farmers and villagers, who were also waiting for their papers and letters, crowded around them in eagerness. Many there were who wanted to go right up to the farm and see the cellar, the secret room and all that had, though unknown till now, helped to make the old stone house so mysterious all these years. But the boys said "No." It had been decided, just before they left home, that nothing should be disturbed nor any visitor admitted to the counterfeiter's den till after word had been received from Washington. The too curious and persistent ones had to be told this again and again before they could be dissuaded from following the boys right home.

At last, with more or less difficulty, Jim succeeded in getting what mail there was for the farm, and in driving away from the noisy, incredulous group at the post-office. Then, pleased with the excitement they had left behind them, they settled down in the buggy and while Skip drove, Jim looked over the letters.

"Oh, Skip," he suddenly cried, "do hurry up! Here's a letter from Sam. And the postmark's so blurred I can't see where it's from! Oh, do drive faster!"

"Ain't it to you?"

"No, it's for grandpa. Oh, what *do* you s'pose is in it? Here, let me take the reins."

"Hold on there, Jim, don't you take on so. I guess I c'n drive's fast as you can. Git ap, you Judge!"

"I've been thinking of Sam all day, off'n on," Jim continued, leaning forward as though to help Judge along still faster, "and I've been awfully sorry he wasn't in on all this fun with us. But now, gee, Skip, if he's heard anything 'bout my father, I'll be glad he *was* away. Hurry, can't you? I'm just crazy to know what's in this letter."

CHAPTER XXIII

A LETTER FROM SAM

SAM'S letter was short and did not tell half so much as Jim wanted it to tell. The traveler wrote, "He was fuller'n rheumatiz than a pig is of bristles," and "didn't think overmuch of New York, it was so pesky full of people, all a-hurryin' for the money they were afraid th' other feller'd git furst." He'd "be glad and thankful to get back home where it was clean and quiet and he could have a doughnut for breakfast like a Christian."

Mr. Burton read that much aloud to Jim and then laid the letter down till he polished his glasses on his handkerchief. The two were alone in the invalid's room and, after an exciting and tiresome day, were getting ready for bed. This would be the third time they had read and commented on the news from Sam, and Jim was bitterly disappointed. After adjusting his spectacles in front of his keen and penetrating eyes, Mr. Burton looked at his grandson for a moment and then said kindly:

"Don't take on so, my boy; he doesn't give him up yet and so long as he doesn't, we mustn't."

"Oh, I haven't given up, grandpa!" exclaimed Jim as he slipped into his night clothes, "for I'll

never do that. I just know we'll find him all right enough but I didn't think it'd take so long." And his voice, in spite of all he could do to control it, would tremble a little. "Well, read over what he said again, will you? And then I'll go to bed, for I'm that tired —"

"Of course you are," sympathetically interrupted his grandfather, "'tain't often you spend a night investigating a counterfeiter's den and the next day telling the world about it, is it? No wonder you're tired. A little disappointed, too, over this news, I guess. Well, now, this doesn't sound so hopeless, after all, does it? Listen!" And taking up the letter again the old man read:

"'I landed all right in New York and went to the hotel you recommended. Don't think so much of it as,'—um-m-well, no use to read that all over again—'went to the place in New Jersey and hunted 'round considerable before I discovered anything, and it's my private opinion that I ain't no more of a hayseed than those critters out there are, though they had considerable sport among themselves, I guess, in calling me one. The only man who knew anything 'tall of interest to us was the former hired man of the defunct minister, and he didn't know any too much. Howsumever, he said he used to write to Laura Green for some time after she buried the minister and moved out to Kansas. She owes him a letter now, he said, and has fer more'n two years and he guessed he wouldn't bother 'bout her any more. If she wanted to keep

company with him, she'd have to write oftener than that. And he's seventy if a day. What do you think of that for Jersey lightning we hear tell so much about? Well, he giv' me her address — Brown's Mills, Kansas. He was civil 'nough but giv' me Vermonters every time; and then I come along back to New York, skirmished 'round some, bought my ticket and set sail to-night. So, no more from, yours truly. If I have anything of importance to say in the future, will telegraph, like as not, for I don't think much of this letter writing business, anyway. Excuse looks, therefore. My best regards to Jim and all inquiring folks. Your obed. serv., Samuel Evers. P. S. Tell Jim the big pig better be killed pretty soon and to set the speckled hen. She's that foolish she allers wants to set in September.' "

In spite of his disappointment Jim couldn't help laughing at this letter; then he tumbled into bed. He thought of Sam, faithful friend and servant, speeding away out West on his errand of love for the anxious old man in the next room, and then, planning of the letter he would send to him, telling him of all that had happened during his absence, the tired boy fell asleep.

Very busy times followed. At the end of the fourth day a great deal had been accomplished. The new piazza was entirely finished. The remains of the fire were completely covered up and the ground rolled. The Italian road menders and some Polish miners from Proctor, out of employment,

had been called into service again and had worked with such good will that marvels had been brought about by their hands. When Mr. Burton looked out of the back door and saw what had been done he was quite as pleased as was his grandson, and regretted the time that must pass before the paint would dry and make it possible to sit on the new porch. The campers, taking turns, had covered the new-made ground with sod and helped Mr. Jones lay a stone slab over the entrance to the counterfeiter's cellar. Then they had tramped through the woods and marked certain trees for transplanting, when the right season came, on the front lawn between the house and the road. Jim and his grandfather had both asked them to do this because the space left by the old oak tree looked so bare and forlorn. "Trees certainly help to make a house look more like a home," thought Jim as he followed the men through the tortuous mazes of the forest. He wished he could stay with them all the time. What they did was not work but play to him. Yet he realized how neglected the little kitchen garden had been through all the past excitement, so he did his best to restore it to its uniform standard. He also helped a little in the farm work being done by those campers whose duty kept them in the fields instead of the woods. Once or twice he peeked into the laboratory. There, however, he was not at home. He did not understand how the students of chemistry and agriculture could help make farming more practical, and he didn't see much sense

in looking at "just common dirt through a microscope and weighing it as though it were gold." When he openly expressed his opinion to Mr. Lyford, he was patted on the shoulder and told he'd "profit by all these experiments some day; that is, if he was going to be a farmer and live in the country. Was he?"

That was a question Jim was turning over and over in his mind on the morning of the fifth day after the discovery of the secret room. He was driving Judge up the road to the pines and sat on the forward end of the load of timber left from the new piazza. This was to be used in building the shack for Gertrude and her mother. They were to come up later to choose the site for it, and then Jim and Skip were to be excused from all other work till it was finished. Skip was now in the village getting screws, nails, and some necessary tools for the work. The girls, aided by their mother, had already begun to make warm caps and sweaters and gloves for the cold September days which would soon be upon them.

Would he stay in this quiet nook, way up in Vermont, and be a farmer? Jim thought of this again and then suddenly knew that he was no longer a little boy. He was fast growing up and soon would have to decide what he wanted to do, to be, in the future. That was something no one could decide for him. Yet it was a question that any one would be apt to ask him at any time, now. Why, Mr. Lyford had already asked him. And

what had he said in response? That he did not know. What would he say to the next one who asked him? The same thing?

"I just bet I won't," thought Jim. "I guess I'll make up my mind what I'm going to be first; before any one asks me such a question again, I guess I'll be ready for 'em; and then I can take my time 'bout answering 'em. But what *do* I want to do? Still go to hunt for my father? Of course I do, but how can I leave grandpa, so helpless and depending more on me every day? That's what's bothering me now. How can I do both at the same time and — Jiminy! I guess I've got enough to think about right now, 'thout bothering over my future. But — I guess I *do* want to be something only I don't just know what it is. Oh, hum! Well, go 'long, Judge, you old skeejeecks! Hurry up, now. You needn't wink your ears that way. You can't help me any. This is something I must work out myself. What am I going to do when I grow up?"

Mr. Lyford's chance remark had made a deep impression on Jim. He thought about it very soberly for the rest of the day, and then, "put it in the back of his head" to decide upon at some other time. It had long been his habit, when worried about anything, to put the question, whatever it was, away from him till he could have time to go up into the glen and think it all out. This habit had grown through the years of his lonely childhood. It did not occur to him now that his grandfather

would have been happy and proud to talk such a matter over with him. If it had he would have gone to him at once and told him all his thoughts and feelings. His grandfather would have helped him. As it was, he quite naturally, as he had done before, planned to spend enough time the next day in the glen, before the work on the shack was begun, to make up his mind just what he wanted to do and be when he grew to be a man; and how to go about his choice of a profession right away; that is, if he could do so without leaving his grandfather. He did not realize that there was plenty of time in which to decide that very important matter, that very few fourteen-year-old boys knew to what they were to devote their future years. Jim went at this question, as he did at every other, as though it must be decided at once and forever, and then everything connected with it would be easily worked out. And he felt that now as always, a visit to the glen would help him. But the next morning, when he waked up, he knew at once he could not carry out his plan.

It was raining. Of course, at first he was disappointed. He did love a quiet time alone with the rocks and trees. But crowding upon that thought came one of thankfulness that the long dry spell was over. He lazily stretched out in bed and threw his arms above his head and blinked at the ceiling while readjusting his mind to a new idea — a rainy day. What could be done, indoors, to pass the time pleasantly? It had been so long since

the weather had interfered with his plans that it seemed queer to him that he could not do just as he wished. So for a short while longer he lay there in bed, listening to the gentle beating of the rain against the side of the house, and the drip, drip of the busy, hurrying drops as they spilled from the crook of the tin leader into the water-barrel at the corner of his room. The swaying branches of the maple tree rubbed against one another with a rasping sound that indicated a rising wind.

"Goodness me," thought the boy, now wide awake, as he jumped from the bed and ran to the window; "I bet the wind's easterly and that we're in for a three-days' storm. Hum! Well, we oughtn't to complain, all dried up as we are and I just bet that's what we'll get—three days of good hard rain. Don't you think so, grandpa?" he said, speaking his thoughts out loud, as he caught up his clothes and danced into Mr. Burton's room to dress.

"I guess that's about the way of it, Jim," agreed the man. "I'm sure we've waited long enough for it, too, haven't we? I shouldn't wonder, though, if we could be as busy as there's any need of being, right here in the house while we're waiting for things to clear up outside."

"I s'pose we can, grandpa," Jim answered. "And say, can't we rummage 'round in the closets and chests up in the carpenter's shop and dress up in those old things up there?"

"Who, me?" Mr. Burton smiled rather sadly.

"Yes, of course, grandpa," replied the boy, "if you'll let us carry you up there again. But I was thinking mostly of Skip and myself and the girls, and — and, oh, grandpa, can we?"

"We'll see; we'll see," said Mr. Burton, who, carefully assisted by his deft grandson, was slowly making himself comfortable in his chair and ready for breakfast. "But come, let's get something to eat first and then we'll attend to other things afterward."

Jim, in his new and happy intimacy with his grandfather, had learned that the words, "we'll see," meant almost always, "yes," so he whispered his expectations to the girls as they ate their breakfast together; nor were they disappointed. It was not long before they were racing happily upstairs anticipating a happy morning.

They delved into the records of the past and tried to imagine the thoughts and feelings of those who long ago had died, but whose garments, faded and tender with age, still remained, a mute reminder of forgotten days. Skip brought the morning's milk from his farm to Mrs. Lyford and Ellen, and then joined his friends who had great fun in dressing him up as a Colonial private, in the musty old uniform found in a dark corner of a closet.

That stormy day and another passed happily away. The children masqueraded to their hearts' content, and amused the older people in the evening with recitations and a little play composed on the spur of the moment by one of the college men. He

wrote many funny things about the different members of the big family which were spoken with such vim by the enthusiastic actors, that the jokes were repeated almost daily the rest of the summer, and helped to draw still closer in friendly intimacy the different members of the household. Every one felt much better for this interlude in the midst of a hot and busy summer. When the rain was over and outdoor work was again taken up, one and all returned to their various tasks with renewed energy. Skip and Jim, looking very businesslike in their carpenter's overalls, with their tools sticking out of their different pockets, started up through the glen to begin their work on the little house in the woods. Jim, perhaps, would not have so eagerly hurried away had he known what news, even then, was on its way to the farm for him.

CHAPTER XXIV

“AND MR. LYFORD SAYS”

SUDDENLY Jim threw down his tools and straightened up; he looked across the saw-horse at Skip and said. “I’m tired. Let’s quit.”

“’Tain’t noon yet.”

“Don’t care, we’ve worked’s hard as we could ever since eight — and — there — hear the whistle? ’Tis twelve o’clock, after all. Come on, now, let’s eat and rest. I’m awful tired and hungry, an’ I bet you are, too.”

The boys left the shadowy recesses of the fragrant pine grove and, sitting out on the sun-warmed rocks where the little brook fell over the edge of the cliff to the ravine below, opened their lunch boxes. Mrs. Lyford and Ellen had filled them full of many dainty things attractively done up in neat waxed paper parcels. The boys ate with a hungry relish and when thirsty rolled over on their stomachs and drank from the ice-cold water of the brook.

“Nice up here, ain’t it?” commented Skip. He had finished his lunch and was stretched at full length on the lichen-covered rocks, squinting up at the noon-high sun. “And how you do love these

trees,” he added, noticing his companion’s intense look as he turned to the grove behind them. “Anybody’d think they were alive, the way you treat ‘em.”

“And so they are—to me,” Jim answered. “They’re the best friends I’ve ever had in my life, I c’n tell you that.”

“Well,” laughed Skip, “what’s the matter with me for a friend? Seems to me *I* ain’t so bad.”

“Oh, you’re all right,” agreed Jim, pelting the other with crackly pine cones; “but the trees, *they* don’t answer back.”

“Gosh! Well, *I* can, thank goodness; you need some one to sass you, too, when you get up on your high horse. Guess if it wasn’t for me to take you down a peg or two, once in a while, there’d be no living with you ‘tall,” Skip answered in his blunt way. “But with me *and* the trees you’ll come out all right, I guess—give you time and me patience.”

“Thank you,” laughed Jim. He leaned over the brook and drank. Then sprawling out beside his friend he continued: “Say, Skip, don’t you think this is the best summer we’ve ever had in all our lives?”

“Uh-huh,” nodded Skip. “And I just hate to see it go, don’t you?”

“Kind o’, but I’m so curious to see what’ll happen to the crops and trees and things the college fellers have been starting this year I c’n hardly wait for next summer to come ‘round. Say, Skip, do you know that our hickory wood’s all going?”

"Hickory! Going? Going where? What d'you mean, Jim?"

"Why, all over the country we're using it up faster than it grows."

"Well, what do you care? I guess the lack of it won't bother us any, way up here in Vermont."

"You selfish pig," laughed Jim. And then he could not get out of the way fast enough for Skip rolled him over and over and back again, sending up in the warm air the scented breath of the pine needles and cones that covered the ground beneath them. However, as soon as he could free himself, he brushed his hand over his face and continued: "Don't you care 'bout anything 'cept what you need and want yourself?"

"'Course I do, smarty. But I don't see what old hickory wood's got to do with us."

"Well, I'll tell you if you'll stop grinning and be sensible. But I ain't going to tell you things if you're still bent on foolin'."

"Go'n, Jim, I'm so sensible now, I'm *insensible*," replied the other. He stretched on his back, pulled his cap over his eyes and folded his arms across his chest in such a mock resigned fashion that they both burst out laughing. And Jim, "to be revenged," he said, wrestled with his friend till Skip was glad to cry "enough! I'm beaten and sensible enough now to listen to any old kind of a sermon; so fire away. I s'pose Mr. Lyford has been filling you full of all this hickory stuff you're so anxious to unload on me. Eh?"

“Yes; he and the others,” Jim replied. “Say, Skip, what an awful lot those fellers know.”

“Well, come on up in the shade and get rid of your share,” giggled Skip. “I know you — you won’t rest till you’ve made me learn something, too, you old sinner. I guess it won’t hurt me much either. So now, out with it.”

“Well,” began Jim, when the two, arms encircling knees, sat in the shade of the stunted pine trees on the edge of the grove; “’tain’t any joke about this hickory business. It’s the best wood to burn in open fires there is, an’ we’ve been using it up like everything and not planting any more to take its place.”

“Plant trees?” interrupted Skip; “why, whoever heard of such a thing?”

“Well, why shouldn’t they be planted, same’s anything else?” retorted Jim.

“Why, I thought they just — just grew,” Skip haltingly replied.

“Well, of course they do,” Jim laughed in answer, “but why shouldn’t they be planted and tended to just like any other crop, eh? Tell me that now.” And then, not waiting to be answered and still full of his subject, he continued, “And if we keep on at the rate we are going now, Mr. Lyford says it won’t be long before we’ll use all our own, or domestic, hickory up. And then what? For we can’t get it from any other country for some reason or other — think they don’t grow enough of it so’s they can spare any. Besides using it for

firewood, it's good for lots of other things, you know — cart wheels, barrel hoops, hammer handles, ax heads, and carriage bodies. So now you see how important 'tis that we don't use it up faster'n we grow it. So the college fellers have been studying the soil on our farm to see if it is the right kind to grow hickory in an' they're going to 'speriment with it. If it's all right there'll be a fine crop of it growing around here in a few years. Until lately people thought hickory'd only grow well farther south or west."

"Crop — crop o' trees," mused Skip. "Sounds kind o' funny, doesn't it? I thought crops just meant hay an' oats an' vegetables an'—an' other things."

"So did I," agreed Jim, "before this summer. But I guess trees are 'the other things,' ain't they? Mr. Lyford says that we've been wasting 'bout forty per cent. of cut hickory every year, too, that might have been put to some good use. When you come to think of it, don't that seem awful? He says that he's been trying for years to teach people how to take care of what grows out of the earth and to make 'em grow things better an' more of 'em. He says he's perfectly delighted with this farm because, 'sides being in such a pretty country, the soil is so rich — never been worked over or spoiled or used up, in spite of what the old grannies down in the village think."

"Did he call 'em 'old grannies'?" laughed Skip, and then added, "Well, p'raps *he* said that, all right,

but the college fellers say *they* think the only future for Vermont is summer boarders and scenery.”

“Well, let ’em talk,” Jim good-naturedly answered; “I notice they just fall over one another trying to carry out Mr. Lyford’s ideas. And you know the slope of the mountain where they pitched their tents when they first came? Well, they’ve decided that just about there is the best place to start a tree nursery. They’re going to put pine seeds in there in the spring; and hickory, too, I guess, though I’m not sure ’bout that though I am about the pines. And then, in two years, they’ll transplant the little trees for keeps somewhere else, or sell ’em and send them away, if people want ’em. You know the wet spring is the time to transplant. They’re coming up next spring —”

“Who, the seeds?” interrupted Skip, laughingly, “or the college boys?”

“The boys, of course, you ‘smart Aleck,’” retorted Jim, too much absorbed in his subject to be provoked, but he did manage to tip Skip over on his back again as he continued; “an’ the fellers’ll keep watch of the seeds as they sprout and weed ’em out — the weak ones, you know — and in a few years will make thousands of dollars, whereas if left to Nature, the trees would only bring in as many hundreds.”

“That so? I want to know,” queried Skip, now so thoroughly interested that he no longer thought of fooling. “I s’pose that’s the reason why they’ve been digging up the earth and mauling it so, all

around here this summer. P'rhaps they *do* know a thing or two, after all. But I did think a city chap was foolish to come out to the country to teach us about our farms — the place where we've lived all our life."

"Well, I thought so, too, Skip," Jim replied, "but I don't any more. I tell you, these fellers *and* Mr. Lyford know more about things — the trees, for instance, in one week, than I c'n forget in a month of Sundays; but they don't *like* 'em half so much, though, as I do." He patted the bark of the tree against which he was leaning in an affectionate way but Skip did not pay attention. He wanted to hear more of what had been told to Jim.

"Go on," he urged. "What else d'you know?"

"Well, Mr. Lyford says that we have so much rain in this part of the State that —"

"Huh," scornfully interrupted Skip, "'spect me to believe that? Just look at this summer, driest we've about ever had."

"Well," continued Jim, "in spite of this dry season, this *is* a moist part of Vermont. Mr. Lyford says that the records show 'tis. Lots of rain does fall here and because of that and the brook, our farm is a fine place to grow trees on, for you can't have big trees and big crops of 'em without moisture. And Mr. Lyford says he's going to recommend his college to cut out the regular farm work and just make this farm a forestry 'speriment station, because the soil, the climate and everything is so well suited to it. And if they do they'll import

trees from other countries, too. Won't it be fun to watch 'em grow and study 'em? I s'pose they'll be some different from our native trees.”

“If I'm here,” Skip briefly commented, and Jim asked in surprise:

“If you're here? Why, where else would you be?”

“Why — if — say,” Skip blushed and stammered. Then he exclaimed, “Say, Jim, were you in real earnest about dividing the reward?”

“Of course I was — and am. Why?”

“Well, pa and I were talking about it last night, and he says that if the detective comes and we do get the reward, that I must use my share of it for an education. He'll double it and send me away to school.”

“Cricky! Good for Mr. Jones,” cried Jim. “Won't you be glad to spend your reward that way? Get it? Of course we'll get that money. Ain't the United States back of the offer? Don't you believe in the word of the Government?”

“Yes, of course,” answered the other boy. “But it somehow seems too good to be true.”

“Shucks,” laughed Jim, “just you wait.”

“Well, I'm waiting all right,” replied his chum, “and not worrying so awful much, either, but it does seem to me that the President of the United States is pretty slow about answering letters. We sent 'em almost a week ago.”

“Well, I s'pose he must have an awful big mail every morning to tend to, and p'rhaps he hasn't

reached our letters yet. They may be at the bottom of the pile."

"Mebbe so. Well, what'll you do with your money, Jim? Do you still mean to go and hunt for your father?"

"Nope. Not yet, 'tany rate," the boy replied. "I've got to stay right here and take care of grandpa. He comes first, now. It seems to me he gets feebler every day, and Ellen says he is getting to depend on me a lot. Ain't it funny? I don't do much for him, but he seems to like to have me around so I can't think of going away; that is, not till Sam gets back. And then it may not be necessary. He may find — *him*, all right. Somehow, Skip, I just bet he will."

"Have you heard from Sam lately?"

"Not since that last letter you and I got together. Wish I knew what he was up to this blessed minute."

"So do I. But, say, Jim, I think you're awful good to stay on here now you've got the money. Just think of how mean your grandfather used to be to you."

"I don't think of that any more 'tall," thoughtfully answered Jim. "Honestly, Skip, I just love my grandfather now. We're awfully good friends, and things are so much nicer now at home than they have ever been before, that I don't want to go away. I feel as if I'd just begun to *have* a home. Well, it must be long after one o'clock. Shall we go back to work?"

“No, let’s talk,” answered Skip, as he changed his position to a more comfortable one. “I’m sure we worked hard ’nough this morning to take two hours off now. Tell me more ’bout the trees and things. It’s quite interesting, isn’t it?”

“I think so,” agreed Jim, and then he continued: “Well, Mr. Lyford said,” but he got no further than that because Skip burst out laughing.

“‘Mr. Lyford says,’” he mimicked, “‘Mr. Lyford says.’”

“Well, what *does* ‘Mr. Lyford say’?” interrupted a deep, musical voice and, to the boys’ astonishment, Mr. Lyford himself came from among the trees and sat down between them.

“Why,” Skip exclaimed, “Jim’s been telling me more’n a jug full of things ’bout the trees and things that you’ve taught him this summer, and ’bout every other word has been ‘and Mr. Lyford says.’”

The man laughed and then said, “Well, I don’t know how much Jim has remembered and told you, Skip, but I am glad he has been interested in our work this summer, and I hope you will both be enough interested to watch its progress through the fall and winter. And, indeed, for some time to come. The fascinating thing about forestry to me is, that you can keep at it during all seasons. It can give you occupation for almost every day in the year. But now, what Mr. Lyford says is this,” he added, laughingly, “I have inspected the work you have just done on the shack. You were so busy talking you did not hear me, I presume, for I

have been browsing around for several minutes. And I think you've made a fine beginning. At this rate you'll finish long before I thought you would. When the girls and their mother get all their cushions and bright rugs in it, it will be very cozy and cheerful. The tar paper tacked up on the outside of the most exposed end, will keep the shack as warm and as free from the winds of winter as would a stone wall. Do you know, boys, that lumber for building purposes, though so plentiful here in this part of the country, is becoming very rare in general throughout the United States? We must feel very proud of our little shack, that it's all made of wood."

"Didn't think lumber was so scarce as all that," commented Skip. He added more pine cones to the little pile Jim had already accumulated. "Why haven't people taken better care of the forests?"

"That's the question many of us are asking, now that it's almost too late to repair the damages, Skip," answered Mr. Lyford. "And what we must do now is to work with all our might and main to make up as far as possible for our past mistakes and protect the future. Don't you think so?"

"Of course. Are you and the college boys trying to do that?" asked Skip, and when Mr. Lyford nodded "yes," the boy continued: "And I've been thinking 'most all summer how long it'd be before you'd get tired, foolin' round here, doing nothing that was worth while." As he made this frank confession he looked rather ashamed, and was

relieved when Mr. Lyford treated it as a matter of course, saying, as he patted the boy's shoulder:

“Well, you are not the only one who has thought the same thing—at first, but now that you know the motive that has urged us on, I hope you will think better of us.”

“Oh, Mr. Lyford,” Skip hastened to say, “I never thought there was anything the matter with you and the fellers. It was only your work, and that was because I didn't understand it.”

“Which only goes to show,” commented Jim wisely, “that we shouldn't judge from appearances. And now I s'pose we better get back to work. It must be all of two o'clock.”

“Quite that,” said Mr. Lyford, consulting his watch; “yes, it's quarter after. I thought it was about that time because I came right up from the dinner table. We missed you both,” he continued kindly, “and you needn't work any more on the shack to-day. In fact, I came up on purpose to get *you*, Jim,—for somebody at the house wants to see you.”

“My father?” cried Jim, and every bit of color left his face.

“No, it's Sam and he's alone,” Mr. Lyford hastily replied. “I'm sorry I didn't say so in the first place. I ought to have known better.”

“Oh, it's all right,” cried Jim. He jumped to his feet and brushed the pine needles and “spills” from his clothes. “And he may know all about my father, and that will be the next best thing to

seeing him. I guess I'll go back through the glen — it's so much shorter. You don't care, do you? For I s'pose you'll come down the road, it's easier walking."

Not waiting to be answered, he hurriedly started; then turning, he asked: "Did Sam tell you anything, Mr. Lyford?" And when Mr. Lyford said that Sam had just arrived on the noon train, and had gone in to wash up and have dinner, and would wait for him before he told anyone anything, Jim literally ran down the steep and rocky side of the mountain in his anxiety to reach the trail through the glen, and so get back to the house as soon as possible.

CHAPTER XXV

NEWS

AS Jim ran out of the rocky and tree-shaded entrance of the glen, he saw his grandfather and Sam sitting on the new porch. They were waiting for him. He stumbled across the meadow, easily vaulted the bars of the fence, and hurried over the new-made lawn to the steps. Up these he bounded and grasped the extended hand of the returned traveler.

"How do, Jim," smiled the man. "What'd you hurry fer so, yer all het up. Wal, I'm back and —"

"You needn't say it," interrupted the boy. "I know you didn't find him. I can just see it in your face."

"You're right, I didn't," replied Sam.

Jim sat down on the top step and sunk his chin in his cupped hands. He moodily gazed toward the depths of the ravine, from which he had just come. But he wasn't going back there. Even the trees couldn't help him now. Besides, he wanted to hear Sam's story. And Sam, rightly accepting the silent attitude of the boy and his grandfather as a request for him to begin, said:

"Wal, I s'pose I might's well tell it now an' hev

it over with, an' 'tain't necessary fer me ter let yew both know how 'tarnal sorry I am it turned out jest this way." He rested his hand sympathetically for a moment on Jim's bowed head and then, hitching his chair closer to Mr. Burton's, continued:

"I reached th' place in Kansas all right, and managed ter find my man before I'd been in th' place an hour."

"But 'twasn't a man, it was a woman you wanted to see," interrupted Jim.

"Wal, 'twas this way," Sam went on as though Jim had not spoken, "Brown's Mills is a no 'count place — don't amount ter a hill o' beans, so it didn't take me long ter size up th' hull town, an' I figgered out I'd find what I wanted ter know in th' store — thar warn't but one — or I wouldn't find out anythin' 'tall. The place wuz more'n half filled with folks an' they wuz pretty much excited over somethin' er other, an' as I see no one wuz a-goin' ter pay any 'tention ter me I'd hev ter look out fer myself, an' what do you suppose? The very fust man I spoke to wuz th' doctor, an' he wuz about ter take down th' last, dying words of th' very one I wuz lookin' fer. Course then no one knowed 'twas her last words, but they turned out ter be so."

"What!" cried Jim, and his grandfather, though he said nothing, looked as startled as did the boy.

"Yep, jest as I said," Sam replied. "She'd hed a 'stroke,' right in th' store, not more'n half an hour before, an' they hed fixed her as comfortable as they could while they'd sont fer the doctor,

who'd come in jest before I got thar. Of course, when I told what I wuz there fer, I added ter th' excitement, I c'n tell yew an' 'twas some time later when we got th' folks cleared out, an' went into th' back room whar she wuz a-lyin' on a sofy. 'Nother woman wuz a-setting by. I tuk a chair jest inside th' door whar she couldn't see me, but whar I could hear what she said. It appears she sont fer th' doctor ter ease her mind, she said, and not ter make a confession, though seems ter me th' difference between th' two is mighty like splittin' hairs. Howsumever, this is what she said. And, Mr. Burton, when I heard it, I like ter went through th' floor then an' there! In th' fust place, her name wuzn't Laura Green. It wuz Laura Greenough."

"Oh, cricky, Sam," again interrupted Jim, "you don't really mean it? Was she any relation to —"

"Job Greenough?" hastily interposed the man in the wheel chair, leaning forward in his interest and squeezing the hand Jim held up to him; and they both looked their almost incredulous belief when Sam nodded and said:

"Yes, siree, that's jest who she wuz. Job Greenough's sister."

"Do you know, has anyone told you about the secret room, and all that's been going on here since you went away?" questioned Jim hastily.

"Yes," answered the man. "Mr. Jones told me driving up from the station, an' I wuz 'bout as surprised as you are now. An' since I've been a-settin'

here, I've been a-usin' of my eyes some, tew. Wal, ter go on. This Laura Greenough, years ago, when old man Crooker wuz alive, found out all 'bout th' counterfeiters. Her brother Job used ter send money to her. Yer see, Mr. Burton, she wuz nigh onto your age, er mebbe a year er two younger, an' she wuz lazy an' didn't like ter work. When she found out by accident, one day when Job wuz at their old home, a-visitin' her, what wuz a-doin' an' whar his money, thet he wuz a-makin' so fast, cum from, she threatened ter tell on him, less he supported her. Wal, he done so, jest hed ter, you see, till he disappeared, an' then th' false money jest naturally stopped comin', and Laura, who'd been a-takin' it purty easy, hed ter go ter work again. An' she didn't dare ter make any fuss about findin' him, nor tell on him, neither, fer she wuz afraid people'd find out she'd been passin' bogus money when she knew 'twaz bogus. She said, too, she kep' a hopin' all th' time 'at he'd turn up again. But he didn't, an' she had ter go ter work agin, an' I guess from what she said, she wuz madder'n a hornet. Wal, after doin' fust one thing'n another, an' driftin' from place ter place, she found herself at last earnin' an honest livin' as housekeeper ter th' minister. I guess it must hev surprised her some ter find herself a-doin' of it, tew. It wuz th' minister who'd married yer pa an' ma, Jim. Curious how things come 'round in this world, ain't it? Course she didn't know that, an' hed never heard him speak of yer pa. But he cum ter see th' min-

ister one day, an' after he'd made arrangements with him ter act as go-between fer any letters or sich, he went off. Th' minister told Laura all erbout it; an' then she, of course, knew in a minute thet it wuz th' Burtons of th' counterfeiter's house. Yer grandpa hed told yer pa, Jim, th' story of th' counterfeiters an' th' reward out fer th' missin' one an' all erbout it, an' yer pa told th' hull story ter th' minister, along with yer pa's other troubles. An' th' minister bein' a sociable kind o' soul, an' likin' his housekeeper, up an' told her all th' yarn as 'twas related ter him. An' you'd hev thought, that after th' years thet hed passed since th' other counterfeiter had been discovered an' Job hed disappeared, thet she would have kind o' softened in her mind toward him, wouldn't you? Not a bit of it. . . . She wuz bitter'n a lemon an' raked up th' old, bad thoughts all over agin. But of course she never let on ter th' minister who she wuz an' he never suspicioned anything, being a simple-hearted, honest man, and she a good cook and careful housekeeper. He trusted her more an' more. Finally when he wuz took sick, he told her ter do all she could ter make peace between th' two Burtons, father an' son. She promised, th' minister soon after died an' — you know what she did? Kep' th' money Jim's father begun ter send home, burned his letters ter Mr. Burton an' wrote t' him thet his father hed hed a stroke. Wasn't she th' limit? She said she guessed Mr. Burton, fer all he pretended ter be so innocent, wuz one of th' counterfeiter's all right,

an' she hed as much right ter his son's money as he hed. More, in fact, for why hedn't Mr. Burton told his son whar Job wuz. Then of course he'd a told th' minister an' th' minister would hev told her — an' in that way she would have found her brother. That wuz th' way she reasoned it all out so as ter keep th' money that began to come ter th' minister ter be forwarded here. Can you beat her fer a female reasoner? Wal, Jim, when yer pa got her letter sayin' yer grandpa'd hed a stroke thet he'd never hed, he sont her a big money order for her ter use ter come here with, so as she could write him just how things wuz with you both, an' let him know all about things. Then, not content with that, he sont her a letter to bring to his father — here it is, unopened, you see, and this is the only one of th' lot that Laura Green kept. She sed she'd burned th' others as fast as they'd come — an' she'd read 'em. An' th' only reason she'd not read this one as well, wuz, th' size of th' money order that come with it kind o' scared her, an' she didn't dare to. So she sont th' money order back an' here's th' letter."

Sam awkwardly took a soiled and worn sealed envelope from his pocket, and handed it to Mr. Burton. As the old man tenderly held it between his shaking fingers, he said, "Well, we'll read it afterward. Finish your story first, Sam."

"Wal, I'm most done, Mr. Burton," responded the man, clearing his throat and beginning anew. "Thar ain't much more to tell. Th' size of thet

money order, as I said, jest now, frightened her, an' then he'd also writ her thet he'd be a-follerin' it as soon's he could. She didn't know jest what to do. So, after thinkin' things over pretty hard fer a day or two, she sont back th' money order an' wrote him thet his father had died. And thet Jim hed, too. It wuz pneumonia what took *him* off, she sed. Now I jest ask you agin, did you ever see any one ter equal her? Don't she beat th' Dutch, Mr. Burton? I'd never hev believed it, never, if I hedn't heard th' story with my own ears. As 'twas, I almost doubted 'em then. Wal, your son wrote her one more letter. He asked her ter come here an' live on this farm — ter repay her for her trouble in forwardin' th' letters an' so forth — while he wuz away on an important business trip, an' as soon as he got back he'd see what else he could do ter make her future comfortable. She wrote him thet she couldn't jest then see her way clear ter do so, but would hope ter come some time in th' future. Thet wuz th' last letter she wrote ter him, and he never answered it. Now, I ask yer agin, d'you ever —"

"No, I never did," interrupted Mr. Burton, "I certainly never did, Sam. Just to think, she a sister of Job! And to allow the love of ill-gotten gain to warp her soul as it did! Well, well, this only goes to show how far reaching the consequences of sin are, doesn't it? And how often the innocent have to suffer for the deeds of the guilty. My poor son! To think that the counterfeiter's misdeeds

should have resulted in such unhappiness and suffering to him — and to all of us.”

“Well, grandpa,” cried Jim, “I can forgive ’em everything they ever did, every one of ’em, for haven’t we now found out that my father wanted to come home? It wasn’t his fault that he stayed away, was it? Not for all this long time, I mean. For he was waiting to hear from you to tell him he could — I bet he was homesick, too.” The boy swallowed hard and winked very fast, while Sam suggested:

“Suppose you read his letter, Mr. Burton.”

“I — I — can’t,” quavered the old man. “You do it, Jim.” He handed the envelope to the boy who tore it open and read in a low, shaky voice, the few following lines:

“‘My dear Father, to think that my angry departure and my foolish silence may have helped to cause your illness, cuts me to the heart. Will you forgive me? And may I come back? I am sorry, and heartily wish to atone to you and my son for my long absence from home. I send this letter, as usual, in Laura Green’s care, for the postmaster at the village says you have refused to accept my letters addressed to the farm. And I must be sure you get this *for I want to come home*. Your affectionate son, James. P. S. Kiss little Jim for me.’”

Jim handed the letter back to his grandfather, looked up at him with quivering lips for a second, and then hid his face on the old man’s knees. It was very quiet now on the new porch, no one was

stirring within the house, and abroad all nature seemed to be resting in the hazy quiet of a beautiful September afternoon. After an embarrassed pause, Sam laboriously got out of his chair and started to go indoors. He wanted to leave the two disappointed ones together; but Mr. Burton detained him.

"Wait a moment, Sam," he said. "What happened to — to the woman?"

"Ter Laura Green-er-Greenough?" Sam replied. "She hed another stroke an' died thet night. Curious how things turn out, ain't it? My bein' there didn't hasten her end any, 'cause she never knew I wuz thar. I wuz rather inclined to worry 'bout it till th' doctor told me thet it wuz th' reaction caused by her confession or whatever you're a mind to call it, thet brought on th' other stroke. So she'd hev gone anyway, an' seems ter me my gettin' thar jest when I did, right in th' nick of time, wuz suspiciously like a divine intervention of Providence. Wal, thet's all I've got ter say, 'cept this, Mr. Burton. I guess what we've got to do now, in order to find your son, is to advertise fer him. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know, Sam. I don't know," wearily answered the old man. He passed his shaking hands across his eyes in a bewildered way. "Your story has upset me so I'm all at odds and ends. I don't know what to say because I must confess that, with Jim, I was convinced you'd find him." He looked down at his grandson as if for com-

fort, and Jim, trying hard to be cheerful, said:

"Well, grandpa, I bet we will yet, so don't you give up. I am sure I shan't. It's good to know that he was sorry for the quarrel he had with you, and now that he wants to come home —"

"But *now* he doesn't, Jim," interrupted Mr. Burton, "for he thinks we're both dead, and he has kited around so that he may be at the ends of the earth for all we know, and we can't tell where to even *begin* to look for him."

"Well," stoutly affirmed Jim, "he knows the farm's here and that it belongs to him. And that letter saying we were both dead was written 'bout two years ago, for the date on this one from him to Laura Green, is dated that far back, so I don't believe it'll be very long now before he'll be coming home to see to things. He'll be wanting to look after his property."

"I hope so; oh, I hope so," murmured the old man.

"I guess that's jest about what he will do, tew," commented Sam. "'Tain't likely he'd be willing ter let things go ter rack and ruin; queer he ain't never written ter me er anybody else that'd be interested, ain't it?"

"I wonder what his business is, anyway," mused Jim, "that takes him traveling all about so; must be awfully exciting."

"Well, I do wish he'd hurry up and come home," said Mr. Burton, "for my time's getting so short now."

“ Oh, now, Mr. Burton,” cried Sam, trying to be reassuring, “ don’t you say that. Ain’t you a-gettin’ stronger every day? ” But, though he pretended to make light of his old friend’s anxiety, in reality he shared it, and was more despondent over the outcome of his Western trip than he would admit. In spite of this, however, both he and Jim tried so bravely to cheer the invalid up and bring back his hopeful spirits, that before long they succeeded in restoring him to his usual patient, if not happy, attitude. Mr. Lyford and Skip, coming toward them from the mountain road, just then, proved a welcome diversion for, of course, they had to be told the news, and their surprise and hopeful expectations of a happy ending to the search for the missing father, which still must be continued, Mr. Lyford said, so buoyed up Mr. Burton’s spirits, that not till he and Jim were getting ready for bed at night did he begin again to doubt the possibility of once more seeing his longed-for son.

“ Don’t know of any reason why he should come back, now that he thinks we’re both gone,” he repeated for the fourth or fifth time, and poor Jim, worried and saddened himself, had hard work to answer his grandfather cheerfully. Yet he managed to do so, and at last the tired old man realized that, wrapped up in his own disappointment, he had selfishly neglected Jim. Then he said, kindly, looking affectionately at the boy, “ And I’m sorry, awfully sorry for you, too, Jim. For I s’pose you banked on Sam’s finding him, same’s I did.”

"I most certainly did, grandpa," answered Jim, gulping down a sigh, "but I've kind o' got over it, already, I guess, for I just can't help feeling that he'll come home. I don't give up yet and I don't want to, either. I wish you'd feel better about it."

"Well, you must remember, my boy, that I can't wait so very much longer for anything to happen, no matter what, for I'm an old man, living on borrowed time, now."

"Not a bit of it," stoutly contradicted Jim. "Where's all your courage gone, grandpa? Why, 'twasn't so very long ago you said you were going to walk, and everything like that. And now, here you are, giving right up 'cause the news Sam brought back wasn't what you wanted him to bring. We didn't have any *reason* to expect things would turn out our way 'cept that we were so awful anxious to have 'em."

"You're right, Jim; you're right," slowly answered the man. "But I guess I've kind of lost my grip."

"Well, you mustn't do that, grandpa, any more than you can help," Jim murmured; a moment of thoughtful silence passed. Then he added, shyly, "And you've got me."

"Yes, I know, and I do thank the Lord for that," answered the man, fervently, "and if you have to be both son and grandson to me for the rest of my days, I ought not let another complaining word come out of my mouth. And I won't, so there! But

I *am* shaky about your future, Jim. Whatever is to become of you after I am gone!"

"I don't see why you need worry about that, grandpa? I'm sure I don't," laughed Jim.

"Well, I do, my boy. This farm's about all played out and—"

"I don't believe what you say about the farm, grandpa," interrupted the boy, "just remember what Mr. Lyford says about it; and you ain't gone yet, either."

"I know that, Jim," smiled Mr. Burton, amused at Jim's earnestness, "but it's against nature that I should last very much longer. And do you know what I make myself think of? Why am I like a grasshopper found in the fall?"

"Why, I don't know, grandpa. Why are you?" Jim asked.

"Because there's nothing left but the chirp."

"Oh, grandpa, if you ain't the funniest," laughed Jim. And in spite of their disappointment which Sam's report had brought, they went to bed cheerfully.

Mr. Burton, tired out with the day's unwonted excitement, fell asleep at once. Jim, however, unconsciously kept himself awake, as he puzzled again and again over the question: "What can be done now toward finding my father? Will Mr. Lyford be able to help me?" It was long after the late evening brooded over the house before the boy, perplexed and unhappy, the question still unsolved, at last closed his eyes in a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN THE GLEN

JIM did not rest well that night. Before he fell asleep he tossed about a good deal, and finally, in the early morning, after many "cat naps," found himself wide awake. Knowing that he could not get to sleep again and feeling, as he afterward told Skip, "all snarled up in his mind," he resolved to steal away to the glen and get straightened out. He slipped quietly from the house, and running lightly across the road, plunged in the pool, now deep and clear again, below the bridge. The water was stinging cold, and the early morning air had an autumn tingle in it that soon told him he'd better rub himself down vigorously and get into his clothes as quickly as he could, or he'd never be warm again. Then, refreshed and hungry, he paid a visit to Ellen's spotless pantry and ate a hearty breakfast from the well-laden shelves. The quiet of the big house seemed to rebuke the least noise he made. He was also afraid he might awaken some of the sleepers upstairs and have an unwelcome companion — because he wanted to be alone to-day — so he was as quiet as he could be, and in a few minutes, with fishing rod over his shoulder, and his pockets filled with bread, cheese and cake,

to serve for his midday meal, he hurried out of the back door and over the dew-wet lawn to the glen. A hastily scrawled note to his grandfather, left at his place on the breakfast table, told where he had gone, and assured him a quiet, solitary day, quite free from interruptions. Consequently, he could think things over to his heart's content, and straighten many tangles — all those perplexing questions which had been growing bigger and bigger for many days, and which had kept him so long awake in the night.

Many a cranny in the rocky walls, or a topmost branch in a tall tree, long neglected, received a visit from him that day. The still reaches of the brook or the little, dancing waterfalls, mirrored his thoughtful face. Several squirrels and birds, startled at his unexpected return, scampered and flew away at his approach, and the old trout, which had been unsuccessfully angled for at intervals all summer, was so surprised at Jim's visit to his own special, shady pool, that he allowed himself to be caught; or, rather, he couldn't help himself! Jim made a fire on a flat rock and cooked it for his dinner, and ate it with the bread and cheese. Some wild blackberries, growing in a sunny clearing, made, with the cake, the very nicest kind of dessert. Then Jim, tired and sleepy, curled up on a mossy bed at the foot of a protecting, low-spreading tree, through whose leafy branches the warm sun flickered down on him in warm, mellow light, and went to sleep.

He slept till Mother Nature told him he had made up for all the time he had lost the night before; and when he opened his eyes and looked around him, Jim also realized that he had gotten the best of all his worries and troubles. They were now behind him. He felt that he knew what was the best thing for him to do, so he was once more happy and contented.

When the afternoon shadows began to creep over the land again, and he reluctantly climbed down from the big pine tree and slowly walked along the trail toward the house, he saw Mr. Lyford coming to meet him.

The boy's unhappy expression of the evening before had haunted Mr. Lyford all day. He could not forget it or how unhappy Jim must be over the news brought home by Sam. So, as soon as he could leave his laboratory work, he had started after the lad, thinking perhaps he might be able to say a word of cheer, or propose some plan regarding the finding of his father that would make him feel a little less unhappy. And now here was the boy, so far as any one could judge, happy, contented, and full of cheer himself. It wasn't necessary to say a word of comfort to him! Then Mr. Lyford remembered what the doctor had told him about Jim's great affection for the trees, and he wondered no longer.

"Hullo, Jim," he said pleasantly, "I came out to meet you."

"Anything wrong with grandpa?" quickly asked

the boy, a troubled look for a moment casting a shadow over his face. He walked a little faster.

"Oh, no; everything's all right. Ellen and Mrs. Lyford are getting supper, and Mr. Burton's taking a nap. So, as my work's done for the day, I thought I'd take this opportunity of talking a few things over with you where we could be by ourselves. Shall we sit down on this log? We can hear the supper bell all right from here, I guess. Well, Jim, what are you going to do this winter?"

"Why, I don't know," answered Jim. "Stay right here at home, go to school, look after grandpa and help Sam as much's I can with the farm work just the same's usual, I guess. Of course you know that I wanted to do something else quite different, but —" and here his lip quivered a little — "I s'pose that's all up now."

"Well," Mr. Lyford continued, "you know it won't be long now, before we'll be going back to college, and I'm more or less worried about leaving our work in just the condition it's in without some one here who understands to look after things. Would you like to be our college representative, look after our work on the farm, send us in a weekly report, and receive a salary for your time and advice?"

Jim gave a long, low, surprised whistle. "Well, I want to know, Mr. Lyford," he cried. "I never thought of such a thing. Gee! But I'd like to do it! Do you s'pose I can?"

"If I hadn't thought you could," replied the

other, amused at the boy's earnestness, "I wouldn't have mentioned it. It seems to me that you answer our requirements fairly well — as to the slight, necessary knowledge of forestry, I mean — and you are already here, sort of Johnny-on-the-spot. That helps a lot, you know, not to have to hunt around for some one to tramp the woods in winter. And then, and this is quite as important, I think you will be glad and willing to do it."

"Glad! Willing!" sighed the boy. "I guess those ain't exactly the words I'd use, and yet I just can't find the ones I want, to tell you how happy I am to think I know 'nough to help. Perhaps," he added, "you think I know more'n I really do."

"I guess not," laughed Mr. Lyford. "We don't require great depth of wisdom, Jim. I guess you know enough about the trees on this farm for all practical purposes, and your duties would not interfere with your school or what your grandfather or Sam might require of you. I have talked the matter over with Mr. Burton, and he is perfectly willing that you should become a member of the Vermont State College Forestry Department, with all its responsibilities and privileges."

"My, how grand that sounds," giggled Jim. "I guess that's almost too grand for me, ain't it?"

"Oh, no, I think not," replied his friend. "Now, this is what you'd have to do. Or first, suppose you tell me just how you spend your winters up here. How much free time do you have?"

"Me? Free time?" laughed Jim. "Well, not

much, I can tell you. I guess I wouldn't know just what to do with it if I was to see any, it would be such a surprise. School begins next week, you know, and this year Skip and I are to go to the academy in the village so we'll have to leave home 'bout half past seven o'clock in order to get there on time. We'll take our lunch. School opens at half past eight, and closes at three. It'll be four when we'll get home. Then I'll do the 'chores,' which takes till supper time, and after that I'll study till I go to bed. 'Twon't be what you'd call a real amusin' winter, will it? But it'll be much more fun going to the academy than to the little school up here at the crossroads. Only, I don't see, Mr. Lyford, just where I'm going to squeeze in any time for you and the college, do you?"

"Do you plan to ride to school?"

"No, only on rainy days."

"What will Sam be doing in the afternoon when you are busy with the 'chores'?"

"Why, I don't know exactly. There's always things to do around a farm, you know. We're always busy. Of course last year he and grandpa did the farm work: plowing for the spring crops, clearing up the fields, picking over the apples and vegetables, and all the rest of the usual work, as well as cutting and hauling wood, and mending the farm buildings, and so on. I helped some, too. But now that grandpa's laid up, and the college has taken over the farm, or the most of it, that kind o' lets Sam out, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does. Our college boys will see to what little farming we intend to carry out for experimental purposes, and we are planning to include your small amount of farming with it. The men will board either with you or Mr. Jones, so Sam won't have anything of that kind to do this winter. He and your grandfather and I have figured it out this way. Sam will do all the 'chores' and what little work there is to be done about the house; the kitchen garden, also, he will attend to. So when you return from school you can devote the rest of the afternoon and the early morning to your forestry work. Judge will belong to you. You can ride to and from school every day. And your principal says you can easily prepare your next day's lessons in the study hours at school. He will arrange your schedule on purpose. Judge ought to get you here from school in half an hour, don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes, and even in less time than that. Gee, Mr. Lyford, you've planned it all out for me, haven't you?"

"Of course, you know, Jim, you don't have to do this unless you want to."

"Well, I guess if you hadn't been pretty sure of me, you wouldn't have taken so much pains to arrange things so's I could work for you," laughed Jim. "And I'm just crazy to do it. When can I begin?"

"We go back to college in three days," replied Mr. Lyford. "But the girls and their mother will

stay up here till little Gertrude is a great deal better than she is now. I feel sure she is going to gain health and strength in that splendid pine grove of yours. And I am sure the rent I shall pay you will bring me in more returns for the money spent than any I have ever received for anything. Incidentally, this money, Jim, added to the salary you will draw as a forestry commissioner, and the reward you expect from Washington, will be a fine nest egg toward a college education. Have you thought of that?"

"Yes," answered the boy soberly, "I have thought about it a lot, but I don't much expect to use any money for that purpose for a long time to come. How can I leave home now? Think of how awful lonesome my grandfather'd be without me."

"Of course you can't go now, my boy," Mr. Lyford agreed. "But when the time comes that you can, I'm very glad that you'll have some money to start out on. Well, to go back to our plans. I'll stay on here, though the fellows will not, till the first of October. And I expect that I will be able to introduce you so well to your duties between now and then, that you can plan to draw your salary from that date. Now for your duties, and I hope you will always spell that word with a capital D. No other word better deserves it. It will be largely patrol duty, Jim. I suppose you realize, as we all do, that the foreign element — the Poles and the Slovaks and the Silicians and the rest of the quarry

men who live over near Proctor, are in the habit of cutting their firewood from your grandfather's woods.

"Realize it?" laughed Jim. "Well, I should think I did. Haven't we had more trouble with 'em for that very thing than you could shake a stick at?"

"Well," Mr. Lyford continued, "that practice must be stopped, or the men will trample upon and kill the young trees we've planted, or will cut the wrong wood, and there is always more or less danger of fires from their cigars or from the coals of the fires they build to cook their dinners by."

"That's all true as gospel," agreed Jim, "but nothing new to us, Mr. Lyford. We've always known all about this. The question is, how are you going to stop 'em?"

"Well," Mr. Lyford smilingly replied, "we are counting a good deal on you, our forest ranger."

"Me!" cried Jim. "How can *I* stop 'em?"

"Catch them first, if you can, and talk to them on the spot, if they'll listen, which I very much doubt. If they won't, follow them home and talk to them there. If they refuse to heed what you say, and you must try to explain why we don't want and can't have the wood cut, report them to the sheriff, who'll then attend to them. Of course, you know in each instance you must be very careful to get the right name of the one you want."

Jim gasped. "I guess you don't know what a tough lot of customers those foreigners are, Mr

Lyford," he said. "And besides that, they don't know beans. Like as not they wouldn't understand half I said."

"But they do know wood," laughed the other, "and they must be taught to respect other people's property."

"That's so," Jim answered. "Well, I understand that part of my work all right. What else'll I have to do?"

"Thin out brush and dead trees, and drag the wood to the nearest clearing so it can be burned and chopped up for firewood. Get the foreigners to cart away the brush, and to pay you for the fagots. Not that *you* need the money, but *they* must be made to realize that they must earn their living. We cannot pauperize this element that is settling in our dear, old New England. We cannot allow them to think that 'findings are keepings.' They must learn to be honest."

"Why, Mr. Lyford, I didn't think that forestry meant all that!"

Mr. Lyford laughed at the boy's astonishment. "It not only means that, Jim, but a great deal more. You'll be learning something new and interesting every day."

"And then what else'll I have to do?"

"Well, the State forester is very much interested in the reports we have sent him of this county and this ravine in particular. He hopes we may be able to persuade your grandfather to sell it to the State for a reservation. With this end in view, he will

come here before very long to map out a plan to improve the landscape, and at the same time retain the natural beauties of the forest and watershed. He will want you to act as guide. I don't suppose any one else around here knows these woods so well as you do, Jim?"

"Well, I'd just like to meet him, if there is any such person," laughed Jim. "Why, Mr. Lyford, I bet I know more about the trees and the woods in this ravine, and in the whole township, for that matter, than any other two boys or men, either, put together. I don't want you should think I'm blowing my own horn too much, Mr. Lyford, but when it's a question of this farm and the woods back of it, any way, why I just know what I'm talking about, and no mistake."

"I'm sure of that, too, Jim," Mr. Lyford replied, "and haven't we studied your attitude toward our work very carefully all summer?"

"No; have you?" questioned the boy, in great surprise. "Why, I want to know! I never thought you were doing that."

"Well, we have, and as a result we are only too glad to offer you this position. Of course the things you will be expected to do will not all come together. Days at a time may pass without anything to do, and then you may be called upon to do many things in quick succession. So you must always be in a state of readiness. You must remember that. Always have your equipment in first-class condition."

"Oh, of course, Mr. Lyford. I'll do that all right. I s'pose the State forester is likely to pounce down on me at any time, and I guess I've got to keep spruced up for him if I want to keep my job. Isn't it great! You think I can really do it? I'm crazy to begin. Will you want me to do anything in the heavy timber?"

"No, not this winter. We will confine our energies to the ravine and the encroaching woods and the young nursery. We'll leave the deep forest for another year, when we hope to have acquired a State reservation. By that time we may be calling you our chief forester, too. Who knows?"

Jim smiled as he replied, "Well, Mr. Lyford, you think grandpa'll sell you this land for that purpose, but I wouldn't bank too much on it if I were you. I don't believe he'll sell 'nother thing or do anything more about the farm till we find my father — that is if we ever do."

Jim's eyes suddenly filled with tears. Then he smiled and looked backward, toward the ravine where the light from the slowly sinking sun fell on the shaggy bark of the yellow hickories, and the curly leaves of the red maples. The trees were already showing the effects of the first approach of cold weather. A few bronzed oaks, sentinels tall and stately, seemed to nod their pleased consciousness of Jim's unexpected good fortune, as the evening breeze daintily swayed their top branches toward him. And in spite of his disappointment about his father, Jim couldn't help feeling happy.

"It seems too good to be true," he said, turning from the trees and looking up at Mr. Lyford. "I can hardly believe that only last night I was so discouraged and blue, that I thought the bottom was going to drop right out of everything."

"How little we know what a day will bring forth," mused his friend. "I'm glad you like my plan, Jim, and will act as forester and general agent for us, but I'm sure it did not need my request to put you in your present frame of mind. I thought, when I met you, just now, that you looked quite happy and contented, and you hadn't the least idea of what I was going to tell you, had you?"

"No, indeed," answered Jim. "Well, you see this is how it was. Yesterday, I didn't know what I wanted to do. When Sam came back and told us his story, and grandpa was so worked up over it, I felt — well, I can't tell you how I felt. First, I wanted to go right off and hunt for my father myself, and then I knew I couldn't on grandpa's account, and then that made me feel worse than ever. So I just knew the only thing I could do was to spend a day by myself in the glen and think things over; and isn't it the strangest thing how one thing follows another? I'd just made up my mind that I had got to stay at home and take care of grandpa, and not think about anything else — my father, or what I was going to do when I grew up, or anything, and I was glad it was all settled and I needn't worry any more. And then here you come along

and ask me to do the very one thing in all the world I'd rather do, only I didn't know it till you talked to me about it! Now I know what I'm going to do when I grow up — be a forester!"

Mr. Lyford shared the boy's enthusiasm, and for some time longer they talked over their plans and Jim's duties for the coming winter. Then, when they rose to answer the summons of the supper bell, he said:

"And what about the reward, Jim? If you get the \$500, what will you do with it?"

"*When* I get it, no *if*," smilingly corrected Jim. "For the United States Government will keep its promise, I guess, won't it? Well, I *was* going to use it to find my father with, but now that I can't leave home, I'm going to put it in the bank and save it till I can go away to school,—less I have to use some of it for us to live on. And now that I'm going to get some rent from the pines, I shan't need much, if any, of the reward and, do you know how much the college'll think I'm worth? Gee, won't it be great to be on a salary just like a man, and have something coming in reg'lar?"

Mr. Lyford laughed. "No, Jim, I can't tell yet what you will be worth to us, because, you see, the position has just been created, but I hope the salary will be sufficiently large so we will not disagree about terms."

"Well, I guess there won't be much danger of that," smiled Jim, "so far as I'm concerned, any-

way. Seems to me I'd be willing to work 'thout any money at all, for besides being awfully interesting, it'll keep me so busy I won't have much time to worry 'bout my father, and grandpa'll be so interested, too, he won't think about him too much, either."

"I am glad for that, Jim," replied Mr. Lyford. "I dislike the thought of your grandfather sitting in that chair all this long winter, and brooding over his absent son. We must try in every way to keep him as cheerful as possible, and in the meantime, unknown to him, of course, we will do what we can to get on the track of your father. I feel, with you, that *he is* alive and, thinking he has no longer any family here, is in no hurry to return. I also feel sure that he can, and will be found. And now, what is it that smells so good?"

"Tea biscuit, and hot gingerbread, and apple sauce," exclaimed Jim, as they ran up the piazza steps together. "My, what a good supper we're going to have, and then I must go down to Skip's and tell him the news. Won't he be surprised?"

Jim's surprising news, however, was not equal to the message which was flashed over the telegraph and telephone wires to the Jones farm that evening, and which, intrusted to Jim's chum, sent him scampering up the road as fast as his bare feet could take him. The boys met half way between the two farms. As soon as they were within hailing distance, Skip called out:

"News — a telegram — from — the — President

— of the United States — Jim! He's sending — a detective — a secret service man, he calls him, and he'll get here to-morrow on the noon train! We're to meet him, pa says, and oh, ain't it great!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE UNITED STATES DETECTIVE

THE night that the boys "were sure would never pass," at last gave way to the dawn, and the bright, clear sun arose on a perfect autumn morning. As they had a long, busy day before them in which to do many last things before leaving the farm, the college boys and Mr. Lyford breakfasted earlier than usual. Before they all set forth on their various duties, however, they found time to again congratulate Jim on the expected arrival of the detective, and the reward they hoped he was bringing to the excited boy. Mrs. Lyford and Ellen, accompanied by the girls, who were going to motor to Rutland for a morning's shopping, also hoped they would be back in time to help welcome the unusual visitor, though they felt quite sure he'd be made to feel at home "without *their* saying anything."

Skip, who had come up from home right after the morning "chores" had been done, and Jim both laughingly agreed to this, and stood in the road a moment watching the automobile till it whirled around a corner and disappeared. Then they turned and ran toward the barn. They were

anxious to get to work on the depot wagon. It needed to be thoroughly cleaned and the harness oiled, the buckles polished, and Judge, too, as Jim said, "must be put through a course of sprouts before train time. It would never do to meet the detective in an untidy condition, for did he not represent the United States Government? And that being so, was it not necessary to show him all the respect they could by being in as fine a condition as possible?" Skip, of course, agreed to this, and indeed, had come on purpose to help Jim get ready, and as it would take a long time to do all they planned, it was with more or less temper they turned back to the porch when Mr. Burton called to them.

"Oh, grandpa, do you want us for anything very special?" exclaimed Jim. "You know how much we've got to do in order to be ready by train time!"

Mr. Burton, quiet and amused, sat in his wheel chair and smiled at their impatience.

"I just called you back, boys," he said, "to ask you where you're going to put him when you get him here."

The boys looked at each other and laughed. "Why, that's so," said Skip. "He'll want to wash up before dinner, I s'pose."

"And of course he'll stay all night," added Jim. "There'll be so much to show him and talk about that he couldn't leave before to-morrow, anyway, could he, grandpa?"

"I should hardly think so," replied Mr. Burton. "I guess we'd better have a room ready for him,

in case he should want to stay over. So don't you think you'd better put one of the empty rooms to rights for him? Kind o' dust 'round a little, and mebbe put some flowers in a vase on the table? I noticed that the asters and golden rod Mrs. Lyford had in the fireplace in the dining room last night, looked kind o' cheerful and nice. Didn't you think so?"

"Well, I guess I didn't notice much," answered Jim, "but I think it's a good idea all right. We'll do that and can I take that old picture of Lincoln from your room and hang it on the wall? Let's give him the room right over mine, 'cause the view up the glen's so pretty. Come on, Skip, let's get the flowers first and then we'll do the other things."

The boys gladly scampered off toward the meadows, presently to return with their arms filled with a few delicately tinted autumn leaves and many gayly colored wild flowers and long trailing sprays of ivy. Sam, who had learned what they were doing, met them at the front door with an old American flag and a red cord and tassel which was draped around an army sword taken from a closet in the carpenter's shop.

"Goody! Gee! Sam, that's just fine," cried the boys. "Come on up and help us decorate the room." In a short time the three, talking gayly together, and busily hanging the flag and picture and arranging the flowers, so transformed the little room that it looked quite attractive and homelike. As Jim said, "as though some one lived there and

had just stepped out for a moment." He wished his grandfather could see it. When they went downstairs he described what they had done as well as he could and then, with Sam and Skip, hurried out to the work awaiting them at the barn.

Sam, on account of his rheumatism, could not move about rapidly, so he sat down in the sun with polish and oil, the buckles and cloths, and went to work on the harness. The boys ran the depot wagon down in the brook. With a bucket and sponges and a whisk-broom they gave it the most thorough cleaning it had had for many a long day. When they had finished it looked quite like a new carriage, and even Sam, kindly critical as ever, could not find a single fault with it. Then it was dragged up into the shade of the maple trees and the boys ran into the meadow to catch Judge. They did not think that staid old horse could be so gay as he proved to be that morning. They were not prepared for the long and hard chase he gave them before he allowed himself to be caught and led to the bars. Even then he tossed his head repeatedly and sniffed the air as if to say, "You just wait till I'm hitched to that wagon and then see what I'll do!" His unwillingness to be groomed and brushed gave the boys work much harder than they had expected, and they were quite out of breath and more or less out of patience as well when the last hoof was cleaned and polished, and the last hair in the tail that *would* keep switching, brushed back in place.

"My sakes alive," finally sighed Jim, "the old

Harry's certainly in that horse to-day, but I guess he's all right now. Come on, let's harness him up and then fix ourselves afterward."

"You go 'long," laughed Sam, "I'll do the harnessing, all right. Yew air all tuckered out, now, as 'tis, without having another tussle with thet tail."

The boys only too willingly ran off and into the house, from which many happy squeals and shouts of laughter came as they washed and combed and brushed till they were, as Sam admiringly said when they reappeared, "fixed up good 'nough ter meet the President himself."

They walked Judge around to the front of the house that Mr. Burton might see how nice they looked; then turning down the road drove rapidly toward the village. Judge, as though conscious that something more than usual was expected of him that day, and still feeling the effects of the crisp, autumn morning, held his head up and went along at such a good rate that they reached the station in much less than the usual time. It was well they did so for as it was they were late. No sooner had they cranked the wheel at the edge of the platform, jumped out and tied Judge to the much-rubbed and nicked hitching post, than, with a shrill whistle and roar the Canadian Express thundered around the curve into the station. The brakes screamed, the steam escaped in a warm, watery cloud, the wheels turned slower and slower and finally stopped. Yet, before the long, snakelike train had quite come to a

standstill, most of the passengers began to jump from the platforms and hurry away in different directions.

Jim and Skip stood in the open doorway of the waiting room and looked expectantly at the hurrying crowd, wondering how they should know the one they sought. While their attention was thus fixed on the busy scene before them, they failed to notice the good-looking passenger who swung himself from the platform of the last car and, passing quietly around the end of the depot, entered the waiting room by the opposite door. He stood just back of the boys for a moment gazing intently first at one and then at the other. Then, placing one hand lightly on the shoulder of the taller boy, he gently said:

“Good morning, Jim.”

Both boys whirled around, astonished, and Jim looked up into what he thought was the kindest face he had ever seen.

“Wh-wh-why, how did you know I was Jim?” he faltered; and as they stepped to one side that others might pass them, Skip exclaimed, with an embarrassed smile:

“Well, what’s the use of being a detective, Jim, if he can’t detect?”

“That’s true, Skip,” heartily laughed the man. “What *is* the use? And so you are the two boys I am looking for! I thought I couldn’t be mistaken — and I am the man you came to meet. And now,” as the boys were still too surprised to do anything

save gaze at the one of whom they had thought and talked so much, "that we have found each other, suppose we move on, shall we?"

Thus advised, Skip eagerly took his suit case and Jim ran on ahead and untied Judge. The detective was a tall, thin man with sloping shoulders, and though nothing in his appearance, he was quietly dressed in a dark blue serge suit, indicating his profession, he delighted the boys right away by throwing open his coat and showing them the badge of his office pinned way back, out of sight. Jim thought *he'd* wear it so that every one could see it! But probably the detective was used to it by this time! And when he asked him about it, the man laughingly said that was just why he didn't wear it—he didn't want others to see it. He used to be asked so many questions that he found the only thing he could do was to keep his badge hidden.

"Well," Skip ventured to say, "I think I'd know you were a detective even without the badge, your eyes are so sharp they seem to look right through a feller."

By this time the detective had taken his seat in the rear of the carriage and reached out his hand for his bag. Skip gave it to him and then jumped up beside Jim who turned Judge toward home. It was well that the horse knew the road and could be trusted to keep it. He jogged along according to his own will for the greater part of the way, because the boys were so excited telling their story and answering the detective's questions they spent the most

of the time with their backs toward the dashboard.

Skip did more than half of the talking. For some unaccountable reason, Jim felt shy. He was content just to look at the detective and to listen to what he said. The visitor had a very jolly laugh and merry gray eyes that twinkled when he smiled. Once, when he absent-mindedly rested his hand on Jim's shoulder and let it stay, the boy felt that he liked to have it there. And it wasn't the thought of the reward that made him feel so, either! Jim was conscious that here was a friend, some one who — perhaps — could help him find his father within a very short time.

While the story of the secret passage and room was still being told, they passed Skip's farm and not till the big, gray stone inn came in sight farther on did Jim think to say, "See, there's our house that we're talking about now." He reined in Judge and stopped that he could the better point out the window up in the secret room. The detective leaned forward and while Skip happily continued their wonderful narrative, the keen, gray eyes rapidly scanned the front of the house that, with gay flowers on stone porch and in the doorway, open windows and pretty curtains, looked like a comfortable and happy home. Blackie was stretched at full length, asleep, in a patch of sunshine, but no other sign of life was to be seen.

"Guess grandpa must be inside taking a nap," said Jim, as he chirped to Judge and drove around

the corner of the house to the dooryard, "'r else he'd be out watching for us."

"Let us be as quiet as we can, then, not to disturb him," whispered the detective, "it would be a pity to wake him up."

"Not much danger of that," softly answered Jim. "He's an orful good sleeper. Do you mind waiting till we unharness Judge? 'Twon't take but a minute; then we'll show you up to your room. P'rhaps, you'd like to rest before dinner. It's going to be a little late to-day 'cause the folks went to Rutland this morning. If you're hungry, though, I can get you some milk and a doughnut."

"I didn't know I was hungry till this minute," smilingly answered the detective, "but I think a glass of milk and a doughnut—one of Ellen's doughnuts—would just go to the spot."

"How'd you know they were Ellen's doughnuts?" giggled Skip.

"Oh, it's more of his detective work, I s'pose," said Jim gayly.

"Well, it's not quite that this time," laughed their new friend, "for in one of the three letters that told the President your story, the writer let us know about Ellen. I've a great deal to tell you boys about the interest those letters created in our official family in Washington, but think I'd better wait till we can all get together and have one big powwow, don't you think so? Then I shall only have to tell my part of the story once and you can all hear."

"Yep, that's all right," consented the boys, "but

I don't believe we can wait one single minute later than after supper to-night. Then the college fellers will be through their work and Skip's family can all come up."

By this time Jim had lowered the shafts and slipped the harness from Judge. The horse wrinkled his back as though glad to be free again and started on a run for the pasture. The boys quickly put up the bars behind him and then, taking the bag to the foot of the stairs, led their visitor to the pantry where they all found a glass of milk and more than one doughnut! A few moments later they were well repaid for their work of the early morning. The detective was delighted with his room and kept walking around, his hands thrust deep down in his pockets, saying again and again:

"And you did this for me; you did this for me! I'm so pleased, boys. But why?"

"Well, 'twas grandpa's idea, in the first place," Jim replied. "He said he thought it would be nice to make you feel at home."

"'At home'—home," said the man reflectively. "Well, that's what it certainly is, Jim, a home. It looks it, it feels it, and it makes me glad indeed to think I may be 'at home' here for awhile. You know United States detectives are members of that large body of workers for the Government, many of whom have no settled homes. Now I, for instance, have traveled about for so many years that this is the first time I've been 'at home,'" here he stood in front of Jim and smiled at the boy as he con-

tinued, "for more years than I'd like to tell you, and —" suddenly he stopped, and, once more thrusting his hands in his pockets, recommenced his walk around the room. The boys were embarrassed and didn't know what to do or say. Fortunately, however, Jim, who glanced out of the window just then, saw Sam crossing the dooryard so he exclaimed:

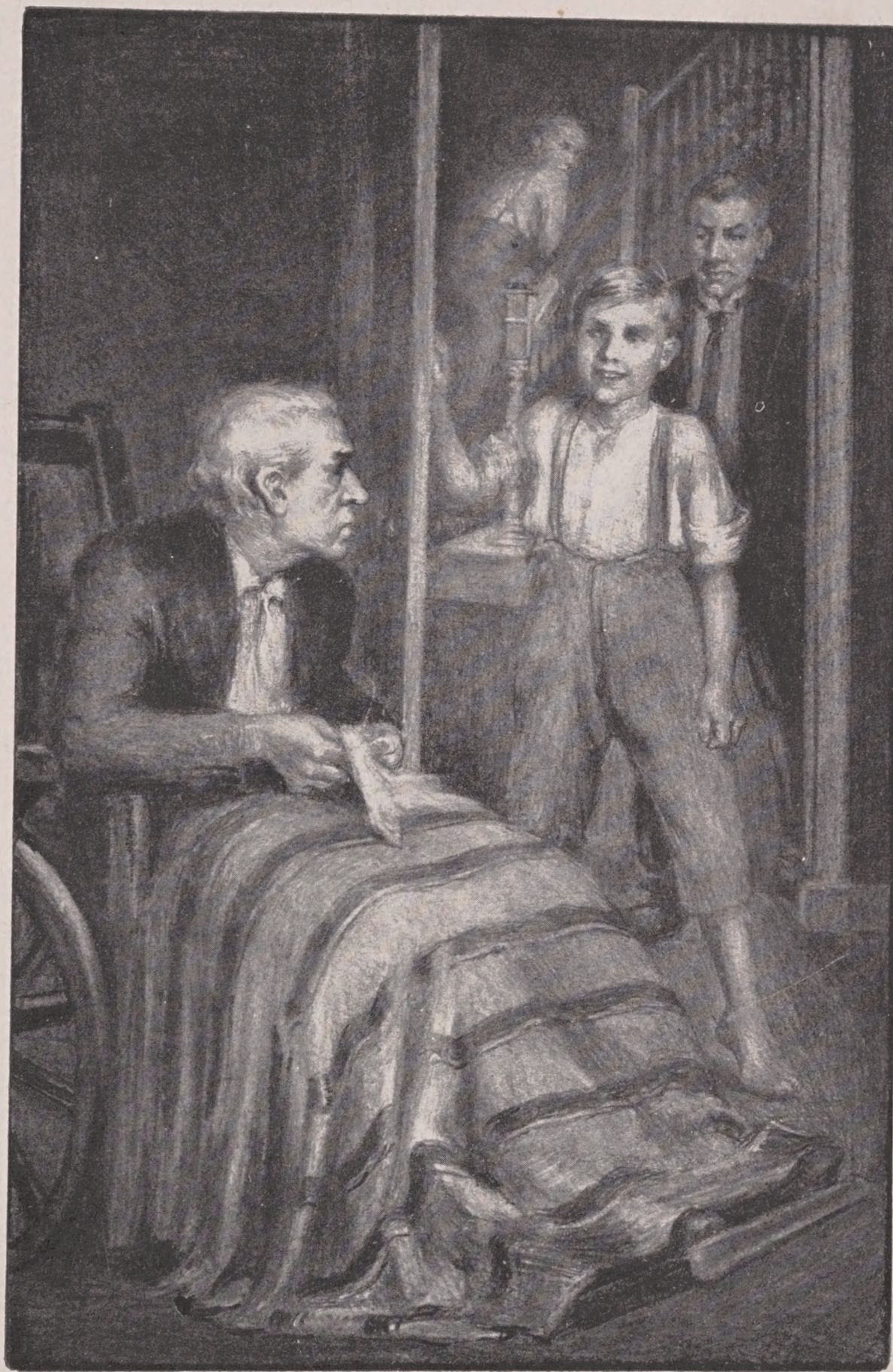
"Oh, don't you want to come down now and see Sam, our hired man? He's an awful nice feller!"

"Yes, indeed," agreed the detective, smiling in an amused way. "Of course I want to meet Sam, for I'm very anxious to hear all about this Western trip of his. Without knowing it he did a fine bit of detective work on his own account, didn't he? We shall have a great deal to tell each other. Shall I go first?"

Jim nodded and followed him down the broad, shallow staircase. When they reached the lower hall they heard Mr. Burton call. He was awake.

"Oh, come meet my grandfather first," cried Jim. Darting forward he opened the door and entered the front room. "Oh, grandpa," he exclaimed, "you 'wake? Here he is! Here's the detective!"

Mr. Burton, in his wheel chair, was sitting in the center of the room immediately opposite the door. When Jim entered he was polishing his spectacles. That done, he adjusted them in front of his keen eyes and graciously looked up to Jim's companion who stood just behind the boy, while Skip hovered by, a few steps farther in the rear. Suddenly the



“ Oh, Grandpa, you 'wake? Here he is! Here's the detective.”

invalid did something which, unassisted, he had not done since he was thrown from the old oak tree many weeks ago. He stood up! Jim, frightened, he did not know why, jumped toward him.

"Grandpa!" he cried. But the old man pushed past the boy as though he were not there. Taking first one, then another faltering step forward, he held out his shaking, eager arms to the stranger on the threshold, and before the detective could say a word the old man cried:

"Jim! Jimmie, boy! You've come back! Oh, my son, my son, you've come home!"

Skip quietly stepped back into the hall and softly closed the door.

"I don't believe it's true," he cried; "I don't believe it's true!"

Then he raced down the hall, out on the back porch and almost upset Sam, who was just about to sit down in the shade on the top step. "What d'you s'pose?" he exclaimed. "The detective's come and he's in there walking 'round. He's Mr. Burton's father and Jim saw the chair stand up and walk, too, 'thout holding on to anything 'tall! And then Jim began to cry and his grandfather called the detective —"

"Hold on there now, Skip," interrupted Sam. "Quit yer didoes. What yer trying ter say, anyhow? Who called the detective what and what's th' chair got to do 'ith it anyhow?"

"Oh, gosh," laughed Skip. "I never was so ex-

cited in my life!" He dropped down beside the hired man.

"I certin'ly agree with yer," smilingly agreed Sam, "but I shouldn't think thet just th' sight of a detective, even if he is sent by the President of th' United States, would upset yer so. He's only plain man after all. Whar's Jim?"

"Well, he may be a plain man all right," replied Skip, "though I think he's a mighty good-looking one—but he's more'n a detective. What d'you think Mr. Burton did when he saw him? Stood up and walked half way 'cross the room! Without taking hold 'er anybody! Yep, that's just what happened, Sam, for I saw him do it! *And the detective is Jim's father!* What do you think of that?"

Sam gave one startled glance at Skip. Then he slowly rose to his feet and started for the door in silence. There he hesitated and stood in a dazed manner, looking back at the boy.

"I don't believe it," he whispered.

"Exactly what I said," came the answer. "Don't seem's though it *could* be so, does it?" Yet while they stood silently gazing at each other, trying to realize what it all meant, Mr. Burton's door opened and Jim ran out to them.

"Sam, you here?" he cried. "Come on in, will you? *My father* wants to see you."

He grasped the trembling hand of the faithful hired man and hastily led him indoors again. Sam looked in awe at his happy, shining face. Then, hearing the horn of the returning automobile, he

made several hand-springs over the lawn on his way to greet the home-comers and tell them the wonderful news.

THE END

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